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QUEBEC CHAPEL

SERMONS,

VOL. II.

PREACHED IN THE LATTER HALF OF 1854.

✓ BY

HENRY ALFORD, B.D.

MINISTER OF THE CHAPEL.

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TO THE

REV. JOHN HAMPDEN GURNEY, M.A.

RECTOR OF ST. MARY'S, MARYLEBONE,

THIS VOLUME IS DEDICATED,

AS A TOKEN OF RESPECT

AND GRATITUDE.

PREFACE.

THE two volumes now completed contain, with few exceptions, the morning sermons preached at Quebec Chapel during the first year of my ministry there.

One excuse for publishing them must be this: that the Pastor who has first to make acquaintance with a London congregation, is in some measure compelled to resort to the press. It is only during a few months of the year, that many of his most influential parishioners can hear him in the pulpit. My only method of addressing them, on many important elementary subjects, which cannot be continually repeated, is, by placing my teaching on record, as I have now done.

This circumstance will explain the insertion of several sermons, especially in Vol. I., of merely congregational interest.

But I own that other reasons have contributed to induce me to issue this second volume. The times in which we live are so solemn, that allusions to them from the pulpit assume more than occasional interest,—and the instructions derived from them may, by God's blessing, continue to work, long after they were first uttered.

With these few remarks, I commit these volumes to the divine blessing. May God pardon their imperfections, and make them fruitful for good.

London, Feb. 1855.

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SERMON I.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

1854.

Acts xx. 35.

“Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

THIS saying of our Lord is often and most properly used as a direct incentive towards charitable contributions. But I have chosen it for our subject to-day, when no such contribution is asked from us, that I may dwell on its meaning as it has practical reference to the daily lives of all ; that I may enquire with you into the limits of the two acts here mentioned—GIVING, and RECEIVING ; and ascertain, if we may be enabled to do so, WHEREIN it is more blessed to give than to receive.

The subject is an important one. For this is among the matters in our Christian teaching and practice, which at the present time are obviously out of joint, and in an unreal and

most undesirable state. The pulpit is loud in its exhortations to give. There we hear that all must be devoted to God and His work. No claim can be too large for our preachers; no self-sacrifice too severe for our congregations. But if we look abroad into the week-day lives of our people, their ordinary practice is evidently not led by the pulpit rule. There is one tacit agreement among us, that the pulpit shall go on in its requirements; and another tacit agreement among us, that those requirements shall be disregarded. Here then obviously is something wrong. Either we preach too high, or we live too low. Or, perhaps, both are the case. We want a midway point, where precept and practice may meet. We are set here, not to rail at society, nor to leave society as we find it, but to improve society; not to cut down the existing tree, and hazard the experiment of planting new ones, but to engraft upon its mature vigour and flowing sap the power and promise of nobler fruit.

Let us begin by defining our terms. To GIVE, in the general and large sense, represents all that part of man's life wherein there is a going out from him towards others for good. In the narrower sense, it will be, the mere bestowal of money. But obviously this will not satisfy the extent of our Lord's saying. Man's life, according to it, is to be regarded as consisting, as far as this matter is con-

cerned, of two parts, giving and receiving : the first, where a man is the source of good,—the second where he is its receptacle. And thus, TO RECEIVE, will represent all that part of life wherein there is a flowing in from without to ourselves. And here too it is well not to mistake the extent of the meaning. A flowing in of *what* must not at present be considered. The contrast is set simply between self flowing out, and self gathering in.

Let us moreover observe, that as man's life is here regarded as made up of these two parts, so *both* are necessary to it. Life cannot be all flowing out ; resources would fail. Life cannot be all gathering in ; for a footing whence, and influence whereby to gather must be established. So in the wide sense, we must all give, and we must all receive. And as matter of fact this is so. The most bountiful giver is also an abundant receiver : he that watereth is watered also himself. The most grasping receiver is, though not to the same extent, a giver ; he lays out, to bring greater returns. Through business, through social intercourse, through recreation, the same two great courses of action run ever parallel. We impart, and we receive, information ; we reciprocate good wishes and affection ; we interchange fond enquiries, and rely on the interest which others take in us to confess our feelings to them. So inseparable are the two, giving and receiving ;

ever balancing and controlling one another in the regulation of life, and by their due proportion, constituting its charm and its blessing.

But what is this proportion,—and what is this blessing? These are the questions which our text gives us to answer.

In order to ascertain the proportion, we must contemplate the two for awhile, separate; must sever the clasped hands of the sisters, and confer with each alone. With each, *alone*; taking care that no presence of, or regard for the other interfere with the simplicity of each. For instance: a man may give, in order to receive; this is not giving, pure and simple. In ordinary life, we see easily the force of this; a man who lays himself out in good deeds merely for self-advancement,—Absalom, who gained the hearts of the men of Israel that he might overturn his father's throne,—the unprincipled candidate for place, who bestows bribes that he may gain it,—all such men will at once be recognized as not being givers, in any worthy sense of the word. I will not now dwell further on this; presently we shall return to it: I only notice it now for clearness' sake. When we speak of giving, we mean the simple act, uncomplicated by any ulterior motive. And so of the other. A man may receive, largely and even graspingly, in order to bestow. Here again, it is not such receiving with which we are concerned in settling our proportion,

but the simple habit of receiving with no ulterior object but that of feeding self; receiving, to consume on self the thing received.

And when we have thus insulated the two respectively, and set them the one against the other, our Lord tells us, that it is more blessed to give than to receive; that the act and habit of bestowal is more blessed than the act of ingathering; that the part of man's life which consists of laying himself out, is more blessed, than that part, which consists of taking in for himself.

But now we have arrived at the chief difficulty of the saying; a difficulty which doubtless some of you have already anticipated. It must occur to every thinking mind, that in this one word, "*blessed*," the whole force of the sentence lies. What does "more blessed" mean? Is there any reference in it to *enjoyment*? Because, if there is, all enjoyment being a reception of pleasure, the blessing will thus seem to mean, that he who gives shall receive more pleasure than he who merely receives, and so we shall have set before us the motive which we just now branded by examples as an unworthy one,—viz. giving for receiving's sake. Does our Lord mean this? If the question is a startling one, the answer will be still more so; undoubtedly, He DOES mean this; undoubtedly, He does set before us as a motive, to give, for receiving's sake. For not only does the word

import this (μακαριώτερον), but His other sayings are more pointed on the matter, and leave no doubt. "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven;" "Give, and it shall be given unto you;" "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness," and the like.

This being so, there must be some sense in which a man may give for the sake of receiving, consistently with the highest ends of his being; some sort of pursuit of self-interest far removed from selfishness or greed. And the fact which will guide us to it is this, that we are immortal beings with our place of trial in this world, and our final position in the world to come; with the mere beginnings of our lives here, and infinitely the greater part of them hereafter. This world was not made to be our object or our rest. He who makes it to be so, is degrading himself to a lower stage in God's creation than God intended for him; is taking his place with the brutes that perish; is sensual, when he ought to be spiritual. And though he may aim higher than the mere gratification of the senses, to gain intellectual pleasure, or power, or honour from his kind, yet aim as high as he will in this world, the mark is lower than that which his Creator intended for him; he is degrading himself, and following an unworthy object. There can be no blessing, in giving in order to receive *in this world*.

But when we lift our eyes to the future state, the same considerations do not apply. What we know of that state is very little ;—but that little is of a sublime and elevating character. We regard the pleasures of that world as consisting in absence of sin, in nearness and likeness to God, in perfect holiness, and unbroken love. In order to have any part in those joys, we must be prepared for them ; made holy as God is holy, by accepting His salvation in Christ, living in the obedience of faith, and being renewed by His indwelling Spirit. When therefore a man ardently desires to receive more of the joys of that state, he necessarily desires also to grow in grace and in the knowledge and obedience of Christ ; to become freer from sin in every form, and from every unworthy and degrading motive and act. So that an ardent longing for the joys of the next world, is not greediness, is not selfishness, but leads a man in fact to the mortification of these very vices, by their being incompatible with the object of his earnest endeavours.

And this kind of happiness is evidently that contemplated by our Saviour in the text. It would appear by the word used ; for we do not say “blessed” of mere enjoyment in this world, but reserve usually that term for happiness beyond the grave. At the same time it is a mistake to suppose, that this blessedness does

not begin, till the present life is ended. In its fulness, it does not ; but in its dawn and foretaste, it does. That joy in the Holy Ghost, which accompanies righteousness and peace, is the possession of the subjects of Christ's spiritual kingdom here, as well as hereafter. And to increase this blessedness, beginning in this life and waxing onward, and being completed in heaven, is for the Christian a perfectly legitimate object of his giving.

Thus then we seem to have arrived at a result, which answers to the meaning of the words in our text ; and to have found a sense, in which the blessing to be obtained by giving is a legitimate object for the giver to set before him. But here an objection meets us. Is this not, after all, making our religion a selfish thing ? Is it not, after all, concentrating ultimately on self, however high you fix the aim, regards which ought to be centred in God ? Would it not be far nobler, far more worthy of a Christian, to give, with simply God's glory before him ;—to insulate himself completely from himself, and follow that which is good and unselfish entirely for its own sake, and for God's sake ? To all such questions, which are not imaginary ones, but are frequently asked by the best-intentioned persons, I answer, that I believe such insulation from a man's own interests to be simply impossible, in the present constitution of our being ; that all the most noble and

disinterested acts of which I know, are not, as matter of fact, thus prompted or thus performed; that we are imperfect creatures, and formed to act from mixed motives. And herein, in my view, lies the exquisite wisdom of Scripture, that it does not, as the Stoic philosopher of old, command us to annihilate our self-love, but takes it into account and ennobles it: herein lies to my mind a proof that Scripture comes not from man, who sees but one side from beneath, and goes away upon partial and therefore impracticable theories, but from God, who having made man, sees the whole of his nature from above, and provides for the whole of his faculties being employed, and thus gives us precepts which we can obey in the ordinary practice of our lives. If this require substantiating, I would remind you that in Scripture we are no where commanded to love God for His own sake, because He is the perfection of holiness,—but every where on account of that which He has done for us: “We love Him, because He hath first loved us:” “the life which I live in the flesh I live by faith of the Son of God who loved me, and gave Himself for me:” and again, “Christ’s love constraineth us.” Every where the motive is a reflex one, rising out of the sense of mercies conferred on ourselves, and not out of abstract admiration as separate from ourselves. I would also remind you that He who represents our perfect Humanity as its exalted

Head and centre, is set forth to us in Scripture as seeing of the travail of His soul and being satisfied: that we are told of Him that, acting from a similar motive He, for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame.

Still then, in spite of the apparently lofty and plausible view of the objector, I recognize, in the blessedness to be gained by giving, a worthy motive for Christians to act on, because it is a motive having regard to their highest possible good, the elevation and purification of their nature, which is at the same time the glorification of their Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier.

One question yet remains—WHY is it more blessed to give, than to receive? First, because the act itself is more salutary. In RECEIVING, present satisfaction produces a tendency to rest where we are, to accumulate round us the things of this life, to forget that we were put here to do good: the act, often repeated, engenders a habit of looking wrongly on our chief good, and imagining that it is self-enjoyment down here on earth. Whereas the act and habit of GIVING, tends to prevent these disastrous results; reminds us ever why we were sent into the world; disperses our regard from self on others; begets and spreads sympathy with distress; accustoms us to active benevolent exertion; keeps up a tender spirit, a wakeful conscience, an onward look of hope for more opportunity of good, an earnest endeavour to better society, to promote

happiness, to become a blessing to the world in the largest sense.

Again, to give is more blessed than to receive, because it is *more Christian*—more the calling of the follower and imitator of Christ. HE is known to us as One who gave all, even Himself, for us. At every turn of His life, we meet the Giver, not the receiver. He surrendered His glory and became flesh; He went about doing good; He laid down His life for His enemies. And His followers too are enjoined after His example, to look every man not on his own things but also on those of others. And thus, giving, going forth to others for their good, is, under Christian motives, an advance in the Christian course, a cementing and proving of the union between the disciple and his master.

Again, to give is more blessed, as being more in accordance with the teaching of the Holy Spirit, who dwells in the hearts of the people of God. He is the Spirit of LOVE;—the Spirit who awakens in the soul all real yearnings for good;—the Spirit who makes men to be of one mind, to be pitiful, forgiving, courteous. He that, being a Christian, is bent on *receiving*, is so far not walking after the Spirit, but after the flesh. He that, being a Christian, lays himself out for good, is so far walking after the Spirit, and making progress onward.

Again, it is more blessed, as being more like the Father Himself, who giveth us all things

freely to enjoy : who gave us His own Son, and through Him His unspeakable gift of the Holy Spirit. It is likeness to Him—partaking of the divine Nature by being lifted into the likeness of all His glorious attributes, that is the utmost perfection of created being. “ When I awake after Thy likeness,” says the Psalmist, “ I shall be satisfied.”

It only remains that I say something of the practical putting forth of our sense of this great truth in life : and endeavour to do something towards redeeming the pledge which I gave by implication at the beginning of my sermon.

The text itself should on the one hand teach us a lesson of moderation. You have seen that it does not deal with the unreal and romantic, but with the actual constitution of man, and his possible duties and blessings. And this should be our example in our teaching, and in our endeavours in life. If we tell men, or if we set before ourselves, that we must abandon all regard to ourselves, cast away our place in society, sacrifice our ordinary and usual expenditure which our conscience before God justifies, and devote ourselves unreservedly to giving for good and for God,—we shall produce little effect on others,—and we shall in our own case become the victims of self-deceit. Men do not thus live ; they cannot thus live ; they ought not thus to live, in ordinary cases. Good is to be done, by remaining in our places, not by erratic

departures from them. And whatever preachers may say, or a shallow view of the subject suggest to our own minds, men will go on living in this respect much as they ever have gone on, and the higher you attempt to force your theoretical standard, the further it will be from acting, or having any chance of acting, on practical life around us.

But O on the other hand,—and here is the greater danger, for it is the side of self-indulgence to which we are all predisposed by nature, and additionally disposed by our position here,—let the great and blessed truth of our text never be forgotten;—make not moderation an excuse for selfishness,—invert not the saying, as is the practice I am ashamed to say so largely among us, nor imagine that any circumstances can ever make it more blessed to receive, than to give;—that a life spent in grasping and enjoying, in inventing wants and supplying them, in wasting God's precious gifts on frivolities and adornments and things which perish with the using, can ever be blessed, or aught but miserable, contemptible, and accursed of God.

No, dear friends: let such a thought be far from any of us; and may we, humbly glorifying God in our several stations in life, ever bear in mind the practical and glorious motive of our text: it is MORE BLESSED to give than to receive. May we, as wise men, and earnest

Christians, thus lay up for ourselves in the use of His gifts, rich stores of blessing; blessing here, in growth in grace, and holiness, and love, and likeness to Christ, and usefulness to our generation for God's glory,—and blessing hereafter, when He, the acknowledged and triumphant King, shall sit on the throne of the assembled universe, and say to all them who have laid themselves out for good, “Come, ye blessed of my Father.”

SERMON II.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

1854.

1 PET. v. 5.

“God resisteth the proud.”

WE may well believe, that an influence must reach deep indeed, which lowers a man's thoughts of himself. In the world, we find such an effect produced on men only by the lapse of time, and long working of adverse circumstances. The opposite effect is indeed soon wrought. We are all so prone to think too highly of ourselves, that a few days of unexpected success, a few laudatory phrases spoken by others, a few apparent advantages in intercourse or argument, will suffice to raise a huge fabric of self-esteem, which it will take the disappointments and failures and neglects of years to fret away. What one of the sweetest poets of our old literature said of the body,—

“The soul’s dark cottage, battered and decayed,
Lets in new light through chinks that Time has made¹,”

is no less true of that building which we all erect to fence our self-esteem from rude contact with the climate of the world. As Time batters and decays it,—levels one goodly turret after another, and dashes the gay colours out of many a shattered oriel, light from above is let in upon us: and many a man never confers with Truth, till he talks with her amidst the ruins of his palace which he once built so fair for himself.

Yet this effect, which it takes many years, and the storms of many a winter, to produce on the man of the world, the religion of Christ claims to work as its first achievement. “Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God.” That gate of humility, by which we are told we must enter into philosophy and science, but which so many men of science and philosophy have missed, is the only portal to the kingdom of heaven. It is the only access, and it is an unwelcome one. For a man really to think meanly of himself is the least cheerfully learned of all lessons. Any substitute for it, mankind will gladly accept. Outward mortification, in garb, or diet, or social position, is easy in comparison; and to this multitudes have fled as the lesser evil, flattering themselves that they were humble, and so becoming prouder than ever.

¹ Waller.

Not once nor twice in history has the shirt of hair covered the throbbings of the ambitious heart,—the cloister witnessed the intrigues of boundless love of power. Not once nor twice in our own course, when on bended knees before the throne of grace, have thoughts of self-congratulation twined themselves, like noxious weeds, about our prayers,—have we balanced our unworthiness by our confession of it, and found a righteousness in the very abjuration of righteousness. So deceitful is pride, so subtle: so exquisite an instrument in the hand of our tempter to decoy and ruin us. And as it is unwelcome to become humble, so it is unquestionably difficult: difficult, even to make up our minds to the attempt at all: difficult again, to make the attempt wisely, soberly, earnestly, and in true simplicity of heart.

May God help us to-day, while we endeavour to contribute something to such a blessed end, by the consideration of the words of our text. GOD RESISTETH THE PROUD. And who are the proud? Nay, rather, looking abroad over mankind, might we ask, who are they not?

One has the pride of BIRTH. A long line of honoured ancestry has preceded him: he boasts of the blood of heroes and of princes. Fair indeed is his portion and truly noble, if he be like the servants of God of old, perfect in his generations; not disgracing his descent by mean-

ness of spirit, but rather striving in the highest sense, to be the best of his line. But this is not pride of birth, in the sinful and offensive sense. It is the pride of birth, to stand aloof in thought from the poor and lowly born, to deny in practice the universal brotherhood of mankind, to depreciate God's gifts and God's people, and true nobility of character, and Christian graces, in comparison with that artificial nobility of human society, whose only boast should be, that it has more opportunities of doing good; and whose only exclusiveness, the exclusive possession of the noblest kinds of self-denial. This pride of birth GOD RESISTETH. He resists it, in the course of His Providence. Ages pass on, and each brings with it an advance in man. New powers are bestowed, new fields of energy and enterprise opened. And all this is God's work: the mighty progress of His Spirit, leavening the mass of mankind. But we do not find that the history of such advances has favoured the pride of which we are now speaking. In the vast progress which God has granted to the generations of men, it has not been chiefly the high-born nor the mighty, who have stood in the van,—who have pointed the way to the triumphs of discovery, or tamed the rude powers of nature by the finer powers of science and skill:—these victories have been won by hands hardened with daily labour, and heads throbbing with the midnight

toil of thought. And their effect has been, not to cherish, but to chasten the pride of birth. That levelling of men, which we all so justly dread when wrought suddenly from below, God in the course of time is accomplishing from above; not by bringing down aught that is truly excellent among us, but by lifting up that which is mean on the one hand, and casting down the vanity of men on the other. And in this His work of Providence, He resisteth the proud of whom we speak. By degrees, the esteem in which less instructed generations held the merely high born, will be, as it is being, lessened, and will vanish away: and men will look to them, as they are already looking, (and thank God that we can say, not in vain,) for noble fruits of high example, and exalted deeds of charity and mercy.

Another is proud of his WEALTH. The superiority which the first fancied he possessed by his descent from noble ancestors, this man claims through his ascent from beneath by diligence which has achieved success. It will perhaps not be so easy to persuade him, that God resists him by His Providence, seeing that he can quote Providence in his favour: seeing that all his successful ventures, all his large returns, all his upward steps, are proofs to him that God's Providence is for him. But it is none the less true, that here also God by His Providence resisteth the proud. The mere pride

of the possession of this world's means, how does it make discord with all the course of God's government, and God's redemption, of the world ! How does Christ pour scorn upon the merely wealthy, by His precept and His practice—by His precept, in such discourses as the parable of the rich fool, who was making calculation for years to come, enlarging his storehouses, when that night his soul was to be required of him : and in His practice, seeing that He, when on earth, would none of the riches of this world, but was born in a poor and humble station, though He was the King of Heaven. And to keep more strictly at present to the course of His Providence, can the proud in wealth, any more than the proud in birth, flatter themselves that they are working with God, when it is notorious that both these classes are usually found among the opponents of the true advance of mankind—among the last to read the warnings of Providence, or move at its call of encouragement. God resisteth the pride of wealth. How often do we see some portion of the conflict of resistance—how often do we witness riches making to themselves wings at God's command, and flying away—God breaking down, as in the case of Job, one stay after another, till at last the rich man is left alone and helpless in the day of his sorrow. And how many portions of the conflict are there which we do not see ! when age grows

on, or health fails, and a deep voice within speaks more and more audibly that the day is fast coming when all these things shall be no longer, what failings of spirit are there—what inward struggles between the maintenance of the habitual pride, and the recognition of the truth now forced on the soul !

God resisteth the pride of wealth. And when God resisteth, who shall withstand Him ? Then is the day of His final victory, when “ the rich man also dieth : ” when all his revenues cannot keep his spirit here on earth, nor all the splendour of his tomb preserve that spirit’s cherished tenement from decay.

Another is proud of his POWER. But here too God fights against pride. The mighty ruler, who possesses as his own vast tracts of this earth, and grasps in his ambition for more, who reviews in his thoughts the mind of the nations, and assumes for his plans the consent of some, the indifference of others, the powerlessness of all to resist him, is sometimes reminded, by unexpected failure and disgrace, that the Lord reigneth, and is too strong for the proud. Nor can we forget that other notable example with which our early days were conversant, when we saw

“ The desolator desolate,
The victor overthrown :
The arbiter of others’ fate
A suppliant for his own ! ”

And that which God writes in large on the world's history, visible from the ends of the earth, is not wanting written in smaller characters in almost every circle of human experience : " He putteth down the mighty from their seats : he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts."

The pride of another is in his TALENT. Not the accident of birth, nor the vulgar vanity of wealth, nor the precarious possession of power, causes his self-gratulation ; but the noble endowment of mental ability—of that which after all, in these our lands and our modern states of society, makes the true difference between man and man. This, we may think, may well make a man proud ; and we are accustomed to excuse this sort of pride more than those others, and to deal with it as if it were more to be justified. But O brethren, God will not endure this, any more than those other kinds. He resisteth this, as the rest. How often has the pride of talent presumed to prescribe rules to the Creator—to lay down systems for His universe, and boundaries for the operations of His laws ; and as fast as He, whose glory it is to conceal a matter, has seen fit to reveal the hidden springs of His actions, the speculators have been put to shame, the chains of dogmatic systems loosed, the pride of talent laid low. And after all, what is it ? What does the man of science know ? What can the man of ability penetrate ?

Could we take our station behind that keen eye whose glance lesser men shrink from, behind that lofty brow which asserts superiority and commands assent, we should see how little the greatest mind has to be proud of; we should trace the one-sidedness, the pettiness, the selfishness of mere talent; we should know, with how little wisdom the world is taught. Could we rise to the stations of those holy and happy beings who are strong in might, serving the Lord, and look down on our lower race, set here to strive for truth and seek after Him,—how mean the pride of talent would appear to us—how suicidal—that those who are set to run the race, and nobly endowed for winning the prize, should stand still admiring the strength which they do not put forth,—or still worse, use it in deviating from the course set before them. And if we could rise yet higher and see as He seeth before whom all things are naked and open, every department of knowledge disclosed in all its proportions and all its bearings, surely we should feel how true it is that “He scorneth the scorers;” that before Him all the strength of man is but weakness. Is but weakness; for O brethren, this pride of talent, again what is it? One touch of His heavy hand on the springs of human vitality, one pressure on either side of that nice balance on which this combination of body and spirit is suspended, and where is mental ability, where

is talent? O rather tremble in self-abasement, ye that are endowed with this most precarious of God's gifts, this gift which, more than any other, soils and ruffles and fades in the using ;— and cast away the pride of talent, and become humble men of prayer, that He will teach you to train this frail and tender plant to bring forth fruit to His glory.

But there is one, far above all these sources and nutriments of pride, more common, and more destructive. Many, many men are proud of their CHARACTER ; their inward moral worth ; their sobriety, and respectability, and fair outward standing. And far be it from any Christian preacher to depreciate any of these. They are all precious possessions, possessions to be thankful for, to be most watchful over ; but not possessions to be proud of. Here again, GOD RESISTETH THE PROUD. The self-righteous man, who feels not the deep unworthiness of his own heart, has not God on his side. For him God has provided no redemption. "I came, says Christ, not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance ;" and in the affecting words of our Gospel to-day, "There is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons that need no repentance." For them, why should a Saviour be provided to atone for sin? Why should the precious Lamb of God be sacrificed on the Cross? Such persons are commonly

found regarding Christ as a teacher merely, as did Nicodemus of old; and they are perfectly consistent in so doing. If we can save ourselves by the uprightness of our moral characters, if we have a righteousness wherein to stand before God, then Christ need not have died, but need only have shewn us the way wherein to walk, and we could all have followed it.

But, dear brethren, such is not the Saviour in whom we believe. We believe in Jesus who **GAVE HIMSELF** for us—who died in our nature, which was tainted with the guilt of sin, and of that sin He paid the penalty; and every man who cometh to Him must come as a sinner, convinced of his own unworthiness and pollution and nothingness, and entering by an act of simple faith into the accomplished work of Christ. Then, and then only, will the life which he lives in the flesh be acceptable to God, when it is lived by faith of the Son of God, who loved him and gave Himself for him: then only, when he casts away pride in his own rectitude, and deeply feels his need of an atoning Saviour for forgiveness, for acceptance with God, for the gift of the Holy Spirit to guide and to sanctify him. Thus will all his feelings, on self-contemplation, be brought into their right place; thus his life of moral rectitude, now become truly so, and based on high and legitimate motive, will be no longer

a source of boasting, but of deep and humble thankfulness; and his thanksgiving will no longer be that of the proud Pharisee, "God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are²;" but that of the humble and Christian Pharisee, "I thank my God that I laboured more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me³." Till this is so, the self-righteous man will find God against him. As God's time goes on, and His great plans ripen, the self-righteous will be further and further from his end and object. Build as he will, one day's sickness, one stroke of bereavement, one hour of mental suffering, lays all his boasted fabric in the dust. Well for him, if this be discovered and frankly acknowledged, before it be too late to raise an enduring building on the one Foundation than which no man can lay another, which God Himself hath placed.

GOD, then, RESISTETH THE PROUD. Whether the above mentioned, or any other thing be the source and nutriment of pride,—as long as the heart dwells in a fair habitation of its own, it has no place in God's spiritual temple; self-satisfaction is an insuperable barrier to the reception of the Gospel of Christ.

Does it not become us then diligently to search and try ourselves in this matter? The

² Luke xviii. 11.

³ 1 Cor. xv. 10.

pride of birth, the pride of wealth, the pride of talent, the pride of character, how common are these, single or combined, in human society? How usual it is rather to look for them as natural, and to commend them as creditable, than to regard them as sinful, and odious in God's sight. It may perhaps operate as a check on pride, to reflect, that God is against us ; to look onward and see nothing but defeat and dismay before us—a breaking down of our boast in the day of our weakness, and being left without a stay to lean on.

But I am told, that it is the nature of man to have something wherein to glory ; that we cannot pass onward in life without some cherished object which we may clasp to our bosoms, and call our own, and feel ourselves the better and the wiser and the happier for being possessed of. And, say my friends to me, if you deprive us of our subjects of glorying and take from us all wherein we delight, you will leave us aimless, joyless, spiritless. This will never be : men will not listen to you ; and your preaching will fall within that censure which you have so often pronounced, of unreality and exaggeration. Will you take from us all these satisfactions and solaces of life—birth, wealth, talent, character ! No, brethren, NOT ONE OF THEM. All are God's gifts ; all are good ; all are full of seeds for good, of golden opportunities. I would not take away

one of these, nor rob one of them of its charm. But I would place them all where they may be safely and advantageously used. I would not allow any of them the first place in your regard, or let any of them be the object which you delight in ; but would set far above them all a possession which no worldly circumstances can confer, or withdraw, no individual ability earn, nor the want of it forfeit, nor human worth deserve ; that possession of which one who had inherited birth and possessed talent and character could say, “God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of Christ Jesus my Lord. What things were gain unto me, those I counted loss for Christ⁴.” Here is an object in which man may glory. It is the true exaltation of our nature, for there it was united to the Godhead, and its ransom from sin was wrought in the person of the Son of God ;—it is every man’s best and only boast, for it belongs to him not in virtue of aught which the world gave or can take away, of aught which depends on personal acquirement or efficiency, of aught which can be marred by our own natural infirmity, but in virtue of the covenant promise of the everlasting God, who so loved the world that He “gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish but have everlasting life⁵.”

⁴ Gal. vi. 14. Phil. iii. 7, 8.

⁵ John iii. 16.

Be found in this way,—have this for your possession and your boast, and God will no longer resist you. Your course will be in blessed harmony with His divine will, which is, to sanctify and to save you ; He will be for you, and none can be against you ; and when the proud are humbled, and all their reliance swept away, your confidence shall stand, and none shall make you afraid.

SERMON III.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

1854.

1 PET. v. 5.

“God giveth grace to the humble.”

LAST Sunday we meditated on the fact, that “God resisteth the proud.” We traced pride through some of its varieties,—the pride of birth, the pride of wealth, the pride of power, the pride of talent, the pride of character,—and we saw in all these the proud man opposed to God, and God the proud man’s enemy.

To-day let us look on the other side of the same subject. God is the humble man’s friend —HE GIVETH GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.

But WHO ARE the humble? Where may we find, and how shall we know, these friends of God? It will be to avoid mistakes on this matter, that I shall spend the principal part of my sermon in endeavouring to answer this enquiry.

We use the word "humble," as we do many others, in two senses: in one, as referring to matter of fact without, in another as referring to matter of feeling within. A man is in humble circumstances, or lives in a humble dwelling. This is the first and simpler meaning of the word. A man is himself humble; this is the transferred and less simple meaning, and obviously the only one with which we are at present concerned. The humble, are those who are low in their estimation of themselves. The quality described is one, like pride its opposite, lodged in the heart, and thence working on the conduct.

Now it is important to keep in view this distinction of the outward and inward meanings of the word; because it will save us from common mistakes. It is, for instance, very frequently assumed, that the high born must be proud, the lowly born humble; the wealthy man proud, the poor man humble; and so on of the other advantages and disadvantages of station, acquirement, or ability, of which we treated last Sunday. But this is plainly wrong. It is doubtless true, that high circumstances, and all kinds of superiority, tend to beget pride; and that low circumstances and inferiority tend to suggest humble thoughts: but it is also true that the existence of these qualities does not depend on outward circumstances, nor can it be measured by them. We may have

humility in the highest station, and pride in the lowest. Nay in one case, that of the very first order of talent, it is far more common to find humility than in the very lowest, where ignorance of a man's ignorance and weakness leaves his natural pride unchecked. So that, due regard being had to the influence of outward circumstances, we may safely treat of this quality in its root, without taking them into consideration.

The humble man then thinks lowly of himself. But again, how "thinks lowly of himself?" Because there are various ways of having a low opinion of oneself, which do not amount to humility. Let us mention some of them. One man depreciates himself, to save himself trouble. He rates himself altogether below the place which he is fitted by God's Providence to fill, and thus escapes the toil and responsibility of filling it. He conceives himself to be wanting in ability for active life: he shrinks from the struggle and competition of the world about him: he lives powerless for good, and leaves no useful work behind him,—just because he masked his self-love under humility, and avoided duties which he was well able to have performed. It is quite plain that it is not of such humble men that our text speaks, when it says, "God giveth grace to the humble." For such men are commonly not found in the way of grace, *i.e.* of seeking strength from above to help

them; and we know the condition of all obtaining grace from above, is, "Seek, and ye shall find."

Nor is true humility, such as is here spoken of, merely a disposition naturally modest and retiring. Such a disposition is an eminent blessing, as predisposing towards true humility; but it is not the thing itself. We have in society hundreds of men truly modest, never overrating themselves or their powers, nor seeking high things for themselves, of whom it yet can never be said that they are seekers of God's grace, seeing that they are mere natural men, not influenced by religious principles.

Nor again is the truly humble man one ignorant of himself, and so thinking lowly of himself. A careless unwatchful man, who does not look within, nor take account of his state and character, can never be truly humble. His humility is a degradation—the contentedness of one who rests satisfied with a lower state than that in which he ought to be, and aspires no higher.

True humility again is inconsistent with ignorance of other men, or indifference towards them. It is in this point that it is most commonly and most severely tried. A man is content to humble himself before his Maker. God is at an inconceivable distance, and never likely to come into collision with his interests or into comparison with him personally; but

other men are his neighbours and his rivals, jostling against him every day. Besides, humbling himself before God may be done in private,—or by a few convenient phrases, uttered or listened to in public; whereas to take the measure of himself by other men, and become conscious of his many superiors, his few equals, his very few inferiors, involves a practical series of self-mortifications such as few men like to undergo. So that we have false humility frequently taking refuge in this excuse: a miserable sinner when speaking to God, but claiming to be without taint or reproach when measured by men, or professing total insulation from them, and independence of their position and opinion.

Nor again must the truly humble man be ignorant of God. On the one hand, as we have just now seen, other men are used by the humble man as standards whereby to see his own deficiency; yet his ultimate reference is always to God. And one of the features of his humility is this: that he does not form in his own mind, and by his own powers, a God for himself, but is content to accept God's own account of Himself, as he finds it in His holy word. On this account of the divine character and mercy, his humility is founded. "Lord, what is man?" is not only his question of inference from the glories of the starry heavens, but his question of admiring love for the wondrous condescension of God in Redemption.

And the truly humble man must avoid two extremes : presumption, and distrust. The former none will suspect him to be in danger of incurring ; but the latter is very often his snare. We find it frequently supposed to be the essence of true humility, to shrink from applying the promises of God to a man's self : to profess to believe God, and yet in the depth of the heart to disbelieve Him ; to stand faltering outside the door of the kingdom of heaven, when we are commanded to knock and it shall be opened to us.

This brief sketch of what true humility is not, will have prepared us to describe it as it really is.

First of all then, the humble man must be a SPIRITUAL MAN—a believer in Christ Jesus. Other men may be modest—may be retiring—may be unselfish—but the Christian alone can be humble. They want the great source, the central point of humility. They may say “ What am I among so many millions of my fellow-creatures ? ” they may say “ What am I compared to the great and holy Creator ? ” they may say “ What am I, who know so little of the manifold works and deep ways of God ? ” but they CANNOT say “ What am I, that the Son of God should have given Himself for me ? ” They know perchance that they are weak, erring, inconsistent ; but only the Christian knows that he is a SINNER. No man knows this in the

inner depths of his heart, until God's Holy Spirit has wrought there ;—has opened his eyes to see that in him, which Christ came to save him from,—and has brought him in abasement to the foot of Christ's cross. Your natural faculties and feelings, dear brethren, will never lead you to humility. To self-depreciation they may lead you ; to self-distrust they may lead you ; to ambition disappointed, pride soured, confidence withheld, they may lead you ; but nothing can lead a man to humility, except God's blessed Spirit, breaking up the hard and fallow ground within, shewing a man what he himself is, and what Christ is : two truths, of which the natural man is ignorant.

WHAT HE HIMSELF IS. The humble man must know himself. And here, as every where, let us not be content with vague words. Know himself? Why, do we not all confess ourselves every Sunday to be miserable sinners? What would you have more than this knowledge and this confession, of which you have just now been speaking so highly? I would have very much more ; and for this reason, on which I will dwell at length presently : that my humility, of which I am speaking, is not to be a mere matter of confession, not a mere sense of weakness, not a mere phase of self-abasement, but a living, stirring power ; because I want a humility which will not lie prostrate and let Providence pass on, but one which will up

and be doing, yea, and wrestle with God for grace and blessing. And so my humble man must know himself, in the plain, common sense, matter of detail, meaning of the words: must know himself just as we know a wood or a city,—all the great straight paths, which lead on in his character to the action and the throng,—all the resting places by the way, all the false turnings which would guide amiss, all the valleys which need exalting, the rough places which must be made plain, the mountains and hills which must be laid low. Thus our humble man must be a watchful man, a practical man, a man with his eyes open, a man practising self-examination. And by this, mind, I do not mean a man who sits down once a month or so with a book before him, and strives to bind that which is impalpable and immaterial down to a string of artificially arranged questions; that may be useful, and may answer for some purposes; but it will not do for humility. O no; we must have a more continuous work, a more real work than that. The self-examination which we want, is the keen gaze of a watchful inward eye directed on the thoughts and words and deeds of common, daily, unromantic life; asking its questions in plain trivial inevitable English, not raising by theological terms a convenient mist, which may throw its search at fault. It is a self-examination which takes account of every failure, every false step, every success also; and

by each and all of these, contributes towards genuine self-knowledge. It is a *habit* of self-examination, becoming at length, like other habits, a second nature—yea belonging to that better nature, which is begotten in us by God's Holy Spirit. Such a habit will teach a man a real low estimate of himself, grounded on fact, not prescribed on paper merely : dealing with actual, not with suggested wants ; with real, not exaggerated depravities.

And WHAT CHRIST IS. If the ground of true humility is to be, as we said, the comparison of my unworthiness with that which Christ has done for me, then a due appreciation of this latter must be essential to it. You may say, "Do we not all know what Christ is?" O brethren, would that you did. For it is a lesson not to be learned from books, nor from catechisms, nor from teachers, though all these are good and proper introductions to it. There is but one teacher who can teach you what Christ is, and that is God Himself. All who know this, are TAUGHT OF GOD. How am I to measure my own unworthiness, how ever to arrive at true humility, till I know what Christ is to ME? How will all doctrinal correctness ever give me this doctrine? How shall I be able to transfer to my own case, where I never felt it, the expression of others' self-abasement in making this comparison? But suppose this link supplied ; suppose my soul has laid hold on

Christ as my personal Saviour—what ground, and what food, is there here for true humility! The Son of God manifested in my nature—standing in that nature at God's right Hand—having brought it through that life of humble obedience, that contradiction of sinners, that death of shame, that grave of forgetfulness—and all on behalf of ME—that I might be made partaker of the divine nature, and of His glory which He has with the Father. And in this partaking of Christ I am upheld by the power of God through my own faith. If I waver, I fall. O is not this, felt in the depth of the heart, enough to make and keep a man humble? Is not every day's delinquency best measured by constant reference to the perfect pattern of Him who is my Lord and my God? Are not the dark spots on me best seen in the light of His pure and spotless love?

And you will gather from this, that for true humility, FAITH is absolutely necessary. So far are those from the truth, who place humility in want of faith; in a shrinking from taking God to His word,—and living a life of fear whether we are or are not the objects intended to receive His Gospel.

You will also see, that this humility is of that kind, which will not let a man remain in indolence or in despondency, but will spur him on to endure hardness, and finish his course with patience. It is measured by, and dependent

on, my sense of the difference between what I ought to be,—holy, pure, zealous for good, blessed and a blessing,—and what I am ; and this gained not by vague surmises, nor by random self-condemnation, but by practical knowledge of myself and of Christ. Will not the effect of it be to draw me nearer to God—to make me every day more anxious to be a worthier member of His covenant, a better disciple of His Son, a more loving and obedient child of His family ?

And now the assertion of our text comes to be considered,—“GOD GIVETH GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.” There is no difficulty now in seeing that this is so. For it is the humble who are ever seeking that grace. The proud have no sense of their need of it ; but it is the daily bread of the humble. Prayer for it is to them not an irksome duty, not a prescribed form to be got through, but the work of the heart, the struggle of the whole man for more strength to walk in God’s ways. It is to the humble then that the promises are made,—“Seek and ye shall find ; ask and ye shall have ; knock and it shall be opened unto you.”

“God giveth grace to the humble.” Yes, brethren, in every department of life this is true ; upon every portion of man’s spiritual and mental action this blessing pronounced on humility flows forth. If it be the pursuit of knowledge, we find that the humble patient

Christian enquirer is he whose labours are crowned with success; if it be in the great struggle of life, we find that those who think least of self, and most of duty, are they who are raised to the head of human excellence and command the respect and admiration of ages; if it be in the endurance of sorrow or sickness or bereavement, it is the humble man who passes calmly through trouble, and reaps the sweet uses of adversity; if it be in matters of deeper interest, even those touching the immortal spirit, we see the humble unobtrusive Christian most upheld in the hour of danger and in the approach of death. "God giveth grace to the humble." But grace is only the beginning of glory. He who carries them onward by His grace here, will take them into His glory hereafter. "He," says the Psalmist, "will beautify the meek with salvation."

And now, dear friends, let me beseech you, in all stations and under all circumstances, to cultivate humility, as that habit of character which God especially loves, and endows with the graces of His Holy Spirit. And be not deceived in your pursuit. There are many false kinds of humility abroad. There is ascetic humility, ostentatious humility, humility which is the cloak for pride. But O seek not, and practise not, any of these; seek and practise that which we have been endeavouring to describe; which, grounded on Christ, on His work of redeeming love, acquires

a genuine habit of measuring self aright ; and not stopping here, carries into common life and converse a lowly, courteous, meek demeanour ; which shrinks at no acknowledged duty, not from confidence in self, but from confidence in God ; which hates and banishes all display, in weekday religion, or in Sunday religion ; which feels and puts in practice what others talk about ; and while so many are after all serving themselves, really and truly serves God for the love of Christ.

This if you seek and practise, I cannot promise you immediate fame, or worldly distinction in a moment ; but I can promise you a spirit lifted far above such things. The humble may often have to endure the vauntings of the proud—may be thrust aside and past by ; but even here, at last they shall be honoured ; and remember, that here is not their reward.

For who can speak of their triumphs, in that day when all shall be righted—when many that are first shall be last, and the last, first ? Then, how many shall be found, of whom the world was not worthy, and the Church had hardly heard, standing high on the right hand of the Redeemer. How many dear children, who have learnt their first lesson from the lowly Saviour, and fallen asleep in their meekness—how many fond Christian mothers, who have humbly toiled on in their appointed place, ministering and sustaining, with none to minister

to or sustain them, till the strength has failed, and they have past away—how many humble pastors, who have laboured unknown and unappreciated in rural solitudes, till the chief Shepherd sent and fetched them—how many diligent poor men and women, who knew their Bibles, and lived by them, though none gave them credit for it. These all have gone down, and the waves of Time have closed over them, and we hear of them no more. But they shall all be there—a bright army, noble in bearing, spotless in beauty, raised in His perfect image, whom they loved, and whose humility they followed. And uncounted ages after, when Pride and Pomp have been long ago forgotten as a dream,—they shall still be there,—lifted to heights of glory and of love, to which no human imagination can follow. “He hath put down the mighty from their seats; and hath exalted the humble and meek.”

Let you and me, brethren, pray, and strive ever, that their lot may be ours: their portion of grace, and their inheritance of glory.

SERMON IV.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

1854.

1 SAM. XV. 23.

“Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king.”

It is one of the many signs of the reality and truthfulness of Scripture history, that the examples most held up for our warning are not those of the worst men, but those of persons in whom there has been a doubtful conflict between good and evil, and the evil has ultimately prevailed: or of men who having been placed in the midst of high privileges and responsibilities, have fallen back on their ordinary characters and natural enjoyments, and despised their loftier calling. To the latter of these classes belonged Esau, whose character is exhibited in the Epistle to the Hebrews as a beacon for our avoidance: to the former belongs Saul, the first king of Israel.

It is not my purpose to-day to dwell on the circumstances under which the children of Israel cast off the direct theocracy in which God raised them up judges after His will, and desired a king to be set over them. I only remind you of these to introduce to you him whose character and career I wish to illustrate and impress on you. May God help us to understand them aright, and lay them to heart for our good!

At the end of 1 Sam. viii., we find all arranged by the divine command, for a king being appointed over Israel; and at the beginning of chap. ix. we first read of Saul. His bodily stature and personal beauty prepossess us in his favour; and as the story goes on, his good sense and modesty increase the prepossession. He had left his home with a servant on a fruitless search for the asses of Kish his father. But God's Providence led him to the prophet Samuel, who had been forewarned of the approach of him whom he was to anoint king over Israel. Having met him, and reassured him respecting the object of his search, he accosts him, "On whom is all the desire of Israel? Is it not on thee, and on thy father's house? And Saul answered and said, Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? wherefore then speakest thou so to me?" Gathering out of the narrative just those points which are important for our purpose, I next notice, that

after being anointed king over Israel, and on his return home from Samuel, God gave him another heart¹; and when he met, as had been foretold to him, a company of God's prophets, singing praises to Jehovah and prophesying before Him, the divine influence falls also on him, and he prophesies among them. So strange did this seem to all who had hitherto known him, that their question "Is Saul also among the prophets?" spreading with his fame in after years, passed into a proverb in Israel. But the incident is important for us. God's grace is given to him; a new heart is bestowed upon him. That mighty change has come over him which brought with it the promise of all excellence and lifted him into the glorious position of a servant of God. From this time all things are become new to him. He is not left to his own honourable disposition to guide him aright in the kingdom, nor to his own modesty to keep him back from presumption and arrogance; but God's grace is his, both to guide and to chasten him. Well for him, if he abide in this grace.

Israel is assembled by tribes and by families before the Lord and before Samuel, to choose their King. "The lot is cast into the lap; the disposing thereof is with the Lord." And here we find in Saul the same modesty still. Shrinking from the lofty honour which he anticipated, he had hidden himself effectually from human search; nor was he found till pointed out by

¹ 1 Sam. x. 9 ff.

a divine response. When chosen to the kingdom, we find with him a band of men whose hearts God had touched ; and when the children of Belial said, How shall this man save us ? he held his peace. We can hardly conceive a more promising commencement of a reign, or one more calculated to gather power and work deliverance for Israel. And so the issue proved. Very shortly we find the Ammonites conquered by him, and his kingdom acknowledged by all Israel. And on this occasion, the generosity also of his character is shewn. “ The people said unto Samuel, Who is he that said, Shall Saul reign over us ? bring the men, that we may put them to death. And Saul said, There shall not a man be put to death this day : for to-day the Lord hath wrought salvation in Israel ².” And then we read of the complete establishment of his kingdom : “ All the people went to Gilgal ; and there they made Saul king before the Lord in Gilgal ; and there they offered sacrifices of peace offerings before the Lord ; and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly.” Such is the character of the chosen king of Israel—brave, generous, modest ; capable, as we know from passages in the subsequent history, of much feeling for good ; touched by the Spirit of God,—under the promptings and helpings of divine grace. It is just the character of many a man, especially of

² 1 Sam. xi. 12.

many a young man, full of high and noble feeling, modest and distrustful of self, coming from a religious home or the influence of religious impressions, and placed in a post of responsibility or activity. All is promise—the beginnings are excellent—we look for high distinction of the best kind, and for bright and blessed deeds for God and for good.

Well is it said, that honour tries the man. One year passed, at the end of which a sort of mark is placed in the sacred narrative, as if something had occurred to separate it from those that followed. The thirteenth chapter begins, “Saul reigned one year; and when he had reigned two years over Israel, &c.” And now first we are furnished with a key to that which had been going on within him during these two years of power. Now first it appears, that the man of grace had been waning, the man of nature waxing stronger. Now first we trace a disposition to set himself above divinely constituted authority, and to act for himself. Saul, with his army, was waiting the time to attack the Philistines in the passage of Michmash. Before he could do so, a sacrifice was to be offered to the Lord. And for that purpose Samuel, the priest as well as the seer of God, had promised to come. His coming being delayed beyond the set time, Saul took it on himself to perform the sacrifice. It would appear, as I just now hinted, that this was not the first act of self-

will on his part, but one of a series, manifesting the tendency of the man to emancipate himself altogether from God's law and make himself supreme; to follow his own bent and natural impulse, to the setting aside of God's positive command. It was on this occasion first that the sentence of ultimate dethronement was pronounced upon him (or his family, as he might have understood it, for the denunciation is as yet vague in terms) in favour of another, who should be a man after God's own heart.

As we advance, we see the self-willed man coming more and more into prominence. His own son Jonathan had wrought a mighty deliverance of Israel from their oppressors the Philistines. Yet he was with difficulty rescued from being put to death, because his father had made a rash vow, which he had unwittingly broken through.

In the first lesson this morning, we have his downward course presented to us in its full career. For his own purposes, and because he chose to be wiser than God, he listened to the voice of the people and spared the spoil of Amalek; alleging as an excuse, that it was to sacrifice to the Lord. The king of Amalek also he spared to grace his triumph. So direct an act of disobedience could not but be visited with God's severest displeasure. Now the announcement is plainly made to him, that he personally was rejected from being king over

Israel. Now we read, that his spiritual adviser Samuel came no more to see Saul till the day of his death ; and the chapter ends in sadness : “ nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul ; and the Lord repented that He had made Saul king over Israel.”

Darker tints soon accumulate. The outward monitor is followed in his departure by the inward monitor also. God’s Holy Spirit, grieved, quenched, insulted, departed from Saul. An evil spirit from the Lord troubled him. I will not now dwell on the circumstances which brought David to his notice, any further than that we may watch the eclipse of so noble a mind, and see the dark shadow absorbing more and more of its brightness, till at length all is obscured. Jealousy and evil passions take possession of him. Once and again with his own hand he attempts the life of his servant and son-in-law David ; and with an army of men pursues him from fastness to fastness in the wilderness, until he drives him into exile for self-preservation. On one occasion he massacres the priests of the Lord for having given food to David, and enquired of God for him.

And yet we see now and then, floated up amidst the surge of self-will and passion, fragments of the wreck of a noble mind and affectionate heart. Twice when David spared his life, hot tears of anguish burst from him, and all the former man returns. And strong indeed

must have been the power of that beauty and majesty of character, though in ruins, which the sweet Psalmist of Israel lamented together with that of his own youth's best friend in such strains as these: "They were comely and pleasant in their lives, and in their deaths they were not divided."

And now the close of his reign and life darkens in. I doubt whether any scene in the masters of ancient tragedy equals this in depth of gathering gloom. One parallel will occur to many of us, drawn by the first genius among men: the catastrophe of that Scottish king, who listening to his dearest but worst adviser, built his throne on deeds of blood. As one hope after another fails him, and he stands at last forsaken and alone, we cannot but recall this Scripture history, and draw the comparison. But as it is more than probable that the gloom of the end of Macbeth was suggested by that of Saul, so it is certain that the greatest master of fiction has fallen immeasurably beneath the majestic reality of woe in the sacred narrative.

The king would be his own master: and he is left to himself by God. He stands opposed to his enemies. He is afraid, and his heart greatly trembles. The brave soldier of other days had become a coward: the wise man was without resources. In his extremity he betakes himself to the Lord: but the Lord answered

him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets. Never were words more exactly fulfilled: "When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you; then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord; they would none of my counsel: and despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices." In despair, he seeks out one of those dealers with familiar spirits, whom in his better days he had put down and expelled from the land. The miserable impostor has recourse to her wonted arts of incantation and ventriloquism, pretending to evoke the spirits of the dead. The venerable shade of Samuel is to be consulted respecting the fate of the king. But where a mockery was to have been enacted, God interposed with his reality. For so I understand the narrative. "When the woman saw Samuel, she cried with a loud voice: and the woman spake to Saul, saying, Why hast thou deceived me? for thou art Saul. And the king said unto her, Be not afraid: for what sawest thou? and the woman said unto Saul, I saw gods ascending out of the earth. And he said unto her, What form is he of? And she said, An old man cometh up; and he is covered with a mantle.

And Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he stooped with his face to the ground, and bowed himself. And Samuel said to Saul, Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up? And Saul answered, I am sore distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets, nor by dreams: therefore I have called thee, that thou mayest make known unto me what I shall do. Then said Samuel, Wherefore then dost thou ask of me, seeing the Lord is departed from thee, and is become thine enemy? And the Lord hath done to him, as he spake by me: for the Lord hath rent the kingdom out of thine hand, and given it to thy neighbour, even to David: because thou obeyedst not the voice of the Lord, nor executedst his fierce wrath upon Amalek, therefore hath the Lord done this thing unto thee this day. Moreover the Lord will also deliver Israel with thee into the hand of the Philistines: and to morrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me: the Lord also shall deliver the host of Israel into the hand of the Philistines³." And as the prophet spoke, even so it was. On the morrow, "the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines, and fell down slain in mount Gilboa. And the Philistines followed hard upon Saul and upon his sons; and the Philistines slew Jonathan, and Abinadab, and Melchi-shua,

³ 1 Sam. xxviii. 12—19.

Saul's sons. And the battle went sore against Saul, and the archers hit him; and he was sore wounded of the archers. Then said Saul unto his armourbearer, Draw thy sword, and thrust me through therewith; lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and abuse me. But his armourbearer would not; for he was sore afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword, and fell upon it. And when his armourbearer saw that Saul was dead, he fell likewise upon his sword, and died with him. So Saul died, and his three sons, and his armourbearer, and all his men, that same day together⁴."

Such was the character—such the end, of Saul. Let us just gather up the threads which connect the two, before we pass on to our own improvement. Divine grace was given him. On a character by no means depraved, supervened the power of God's Spirit to guide and to strengthen him. Two ways lay before him: either to give himself up to the Lord his God, become His servant, do His work, rule His people as His shepherd,—be faithful to Him, and live, and reign, and die, with honour,—or to rule his kingdom as he would, to walk in the sight of his own eyes and with his own judgment of what was good and useful, disregarding God's law and God's inspired messengers. Of these two, the latter was that to which his own unresisted natural bent would lead him: the

⁴ 1 Sam. xxxi. 1—6.

former required an effort,—a seeking and using grace, a fighting with and subduing self, a watchful and scrupulous maintenance of God's will as the standard of right, and a watchful and scrupulous mortification of self-will. And the mischief in Saul's career was, that he allowed self, and the world, and Satan, gradually to become stronger, and at last to hold him completely in bondage: he resisted the inward promptings of God's Holy Spirit, till at length he quenched it, and it departed from him. And then he became morbid, and gloomy, and jealous, and cruel;—liable to fits of ungovernable passion, and settled schemes of deep revenge. And at last we see him, forsaken of God, fallen from all his high promise, a faded and wretched shadow of his former majesty, perishing miserably at the hands of those very enemies whom he was raised up to conquer.

The first thought which occurs to us is,—In this its first king, as in a mirror, behold Israel itself. Israel, like Saul, was chosen by God to rule the people. Israel was gifted with grace sufficient and upheld by glorious promises. But Israel, like Saul, has turned to his own way. Because he has rejected the Lord, the Lord hath also rejected him from being king.

The second thought is,—In this character behold multitudes among ourselves reflected. How many are there, against whom nothing morally wrong can be alleged, who are not

prone to any palpable vice, who have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come, with whom every thing for time and eternity trembles on the balance, and the question is, whether they will serve the Lord in life, or whether they will not. How many follow the example of Saul—strong in health perhaps, robust in body, with life glittering before them,—they put aside the declared will of God as an unreal rule, and rest contented with their own leadings, and the world's rules, and the maxims of fashion. Thus they live; and thus by degrees God's grace is quenched; the man goes on comfortably in the world; certain compunctions will arise, but they are soon chidden down, and the conscience quieted. Instead of obedience, sacrifice is resorted to: in fits of gloom and despondency, the world's society and its enjoyments are invoked to charm away the trouble. And thus years pass on, and bring with them more weakness of temper and less self-government, and each year has its occasions of variance and strife and revenge,—each loses some friend, or makes some enemy, and life grows darker as it goes onward: and we not unfrequently see the sad spectacle of an aged person standing alone, as Saul did, amidst a world of enemies, with God departed from him, his friends alienated, grace forfeited, the Holy Spirit quenched; remorse behind, and misery before; death inexorable and coming on with

rapid strides, and eternity a dismal blank, the thought of which carries terror to the soul.

Such is the picture which we here see of ourselves; and it should teach us two especial cautions: the one against forgetfulness of God, the other against self-will.

SAUL FORGOT THE LORD HIS GOD. He sought not to Him for new supplies of that grace which had once been imparted to him. He was like one of those foolish ones, who slumbered with their lamps burning, trusting that they would continue to burn on, but took no oil in their vessels for a supply. He went on his way, and thought not of God. Now I am speaking to many who have begun to walk in God's ways. The blessing of religious parents, or serious impressions at confirmation, or a youth well begun with prayer, and good resolutions, and attendance at the Lord's table when the heart was yet tender, this was, or perhaps in some cases this still is, the character of the dawn of their day. May you also have grace to know that these things will not always last—that the new heart will become worn, and the friction of the world will obliterate the precepts written on it by the finger of God, unless the writing be continually renewed by the same divine Hand, which must be moved by watchfulness and prayer. The robe of righteousness, which is put on by justifying faith, must be again and again, by daily acts of faith and

prayer, made white in the blood of the Lamb. And think not that because compunctious visitings occur in the midst of a careless course, all is well. Saul too had his moments of compunction. Not only at first, but late in his life, when he went forth bent on destroying David, he was found prophesying among the prophets of God; but such flitting gleams of meteoric light brought not back the sun of his day, which had set—God was not in all his thoughts, nor His grace the object of his daily search. And so it will be with you, unless you return and seek Him from whom you are departing, and live as in His presence, and by His help.

But if forgetfulness of God be the passive symptom of the fatal disease, self-will is the active one. It was this which misled Saul. He LEANED TO HIS OWN UNDERSTANDING. He had his own ways, and his own calculations, where God's will had been already positively pronounced. It was with him unreasonable, that the army of Israel should wait for the prophet of the Lord to offer the sacrifice; so he forced himself and offered it. It was unreasonable, that the rich spoil of Amalek should be destroyed; so he took upon him to share it. He chose to reject the Lord as his Master, and to be his own master; and the result was, that the Lord rejected him from being king.

And just so, brethren, is it often with us. We set out in life religious men, believing the

Bible and reverencing God and His service, but in heart thoroughly determined to be our own masters. What Christ said, was no doubt very admirable ;—He knew all things, and His words must be unerring truth ; but as for His words guiding our lives, it is the furthest thing from our thoughts. And so men go on practically rejecting God in their lives, very strict for others, but very lax for themselves,—not waiting God's times, nor doing God's behests, nor obeying God's inward promptings, till their day of trouble comes ; and then they find God a stranger to them, when they most want Him for a friend.

May we all learn from this example thus recorded on the page of Scripture for our benefit, to be more watchful and more faithful ; less self-relying, and more dependent upon God. May we set Him continually before us, that we be not moved ; drawing ever nigh unto Him, that He may draw nigh unto us. Then when evening comes, and the shadows gather round us, we shall not be deserted, nor in despair, but full of faith and hope,—strong in His help who never forsaketh them that put their trust in Him.

SERMON V.

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

1854.

Ps. lxxi. 16.

“I will go in the strength of the Lord God: I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only.”

ON the Sunday before last, I spoke to you of the character and career of Saul, the first king of Israel. We saw in his case a remarkable instance of a man who was brought into near contact with divine things—dwelt in by God's Spirit, numbered among God's prophets, nay, chosen to stand in one sense between God and His people, as their King,—who yet rejected God,—chose to be his own master, and to judge for himself, in cases where God had plainly commanded,—and thus was at last left to himself; declined from his better state, till gloom gathered over his latter days, and his sun set in darkness.

Perhaps the most striking contrast which

could be given is presented to us by the character and career of his successor, David. It is not my intention to-day to trace minutely the points of that character, or the incidents of that career; but to endeavour with you to understand the main lesson which his interesting and difficult history reads to us, and to guard against some of the mistakes into which men are liable to fall in contemplating it.

I conceive the great master-key to David's character is to be found in our text, and other similar expressions in his Psalms. He was eminently a GODLY man. On God his affections were centred, his hopes depended, his soul waited. This was the rule of his life. The grievous and dark exceptions to its practice cannot of course be for a moment denied or palliated. In fact, the object of every Christian preacher and student should be, not to attempt to set up excuses for David's sins, but to make the proper use of them, by shewing whence they sprung, and what they teach us. And this, as the history of David is now before us in the proper lessons for Sundays, is my principal view in choosing the subject to-day.

Look over the career of David, as you would over that of any other man; and gather from it his disposition and his desires. And by all means do this with our plain modern matter-of-fact and matter-of-justice estimate of men.

Let us have no mystification of God's truth regarding equity and purity, by speaking of David's theocratic position, or of things then allowed, which are now disallowed. Doubtless there were usages then, which have been discontinued with the advance of kindly feeling, and the fitting of the relations of life into their places, consequent on the mission of the Redeemer; but you never will convince me, or any one else, that the eternal limits of right and wrong are to be shifted hither and thither, just because we do not choose to study Scripture deeply enough; you never will persuade us that what is injustice now, was justice then,—that what is impurity now was chastity then. I grant that our blessed Lord, by His teaching, His example, His Spirit, has removed the law from the outward to the inward, even in its enactments; that a very far higher standard of equity and morality has been the result, and we hope for and expect the prevalence of a higher one still; but at the same time I know as matter of fact, from David's own confession, that the justice and holiness of God's law taught men in those old days, by simple and obvious inference, that He requireth truth in the inward parts¹; and that David's sins were as much sins to him, as they are sins to us. The great and precious use to us of the Old Testament history and characters is, that we there

¹ Ps. li. 6.

have broader lines drawn,—both brighter and darker touches of human character,—lessons reaching down lower in the scale of men; biographies not merely of apostles and missionaries, but of kings and warriors, of men grappling with the passions and temptations of public secular life;—sins, and their consequences;—fair promises clouded, as in the case of Saul,—dark crimes put away, but their consequence remaining, as in that of David.

Let us then judge him by the rules which we apply to other men. And what do we find? His course begins as a shepherd-boy on the rocky hills of Bethlehem. Whether we suppose the 23rd Psalm to have been composed during the pastoral employments of his youth, or from recollection of them in after life, either supposition will equally shew what was the bent of his mind while thus employed. Beautiful strains like these do not spring in after years from the recollection of time passed in thoughts alien to them, but then only, when the impressions of memory conveyed the sentiments, as well as the scenes. And if any doubt remained as to the temper of David's mind at this time, his own declaration would remove it, in which he relates, how a lion and bear came and took a lamb out of the flock; and the Lord delivered him out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear². But I would not content

² 1 Sam. xviii. 34 ff.

myself, in dealing with this period of his life, with merely what the doubter will allow me; I would trace many of the most eloquent devotional passages in his Psalms to his youthful days, when he kept his father's sheep; when during the summer nights he³ considered the heavens the works of God's fingers; when guiding his flock amidst the devious ravines he remembered how⁴ Jehovah led His people like sheep by the hand of Moses and Aaron; when looking on his helpless flock and their dependence on him as their keeper, he broke out, "Hear, O thou Shepherd of Israel⁵." And above all, to such a time would I refer the exquisite 23rd Psalm, to which I have already alluded: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake."

All this tells us much respecting the shepherd-boy while yet in obscurity. Evidently, his heart was fixed upon God. Touched with ardent devotion, and deep love for Him, he was not as other youths are. He belonged to a numerous family, of which he was the youngest. He had seven brothers⁶, all of commanding person and bearing. Of them we hear scarcely more than the names in the sacred narrative. But what

³ Ps. viii. 3.

⁴ Ps. lxxvii. 20.

⁵ Ps. lxxx. 1.

⁶ 1 Sam. xvi. 10; xvii. 12.

little we do hear, shews us that they misunderstood him, and could not enter into his enthusiasm for Israel's God and His glory. And, as in other cases, so here, this misconception and neglect tended to sharpen the ardour which it overlooked. In private, he communed with his God. In the summer heats, he abode under His shelter, who was his Rock and hiding-place⁷; and in the night watches he lifted up his soul to Him who never slumbers nor sleeps⁸. We read not of his *mother*; but judging by the analogy of almost all great and good men, we can hardly stray far when we believe that from her lips he had been taught, besides that law of the Lord which was his delight, sweeter to him than honey and the honeycomb,—many lessons of Israel's struggles, and victories, and hopes; that his soul burned within him when he saw God's people, heirs of so glorious an inheritance, yet languish under the uncircumcised Philistines; and that the aspirations of the growing youth often led him onward into bright visions of what God would do for Israel, and into fervent prayers that the rescue might be not wrought unaided by his own hand.

Thus Israel's God was to him a living reality; not a God in books, nor in legends, nor in ordinances merely, but a God AT HAND: in his

⁷ Ps. xviii. 2.

⁸ Ps. cxxi. 3, 4.

thoughts, in his slumbers, in his solitudes, with him evermore. He “set the Lord always before him: He was at his right hand, that he should not be moved ⁹.” And in this time were the foundations of his character laid; those deep immoveable maxims and practices, on which after resolves, after habits, after energies, are built up, and according to which the great lines of action in after life are squared.

That he soothed himself during the long leisure of his pastoral employ with the practice of music, and became cunning in playing the harp, though probably no uncommon acquirement, is for our present purpose deeply interesting, when coupled with the direction towards God which all his thoughts and pursuits seem to have taken. “Awake, my glory: awake, lute and harp; I myself will awake right early. I will sing and give praise with the best member that I have ¹⁰.”

In the midst of these pastoral occupations, the devout youth is summoned to meet the prophet Samuel at his father’s house, and for no ordinary purpose. By special divine notification, he is anointed the future king over Israel. “And,” we read, “the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward ¹.” That is, he became in an eminent manner the recipient of impulses from above,—of strength

⁹ Ps. xvi. 8.

¹⁰ Ps. cviii. 1, 2; lvii. 8—11.

¹ 1 Sam. xvi. 13.

in himself, and power over others for God's purposes. And now a new era begins within him. From mere visions of standing on God's side for God's people, consciousness of a high mission dawns on him. Waiting on the Lord for Him to accomplish his desire, he yet seeks occasions of doing God's work for Israel.

The first of these was offered by his apparently accidental presence, when Goliath the Philistine champion defied the armies of Israel. For I must believe, with some others who have given thought to the subject, that there is an inversion in order of time in our Scripture narrative, and that the seventeenth chapter of 2 Samuel, relating the slaughter of Goliath, should come at least before the end of the sixteenth, where we find David called "a mighty valiant man, and a man of war²," and hear of his playing the harp before Saul.

On this memorable occasion, we have an eminent illustration of his character. He refuses the arms offered him by the king³. He has never proved them. But he knows of weapons which he has proved; not the simple sling and stone merely, but confidence in his own and Israel's God. Jehovah, who delivered him out of the paw of the lion and out of the paw of the bear, would deliver him also from this Philistine: "Thou comest to me," he

² Ver. 18.

³ 1 Sam. xvii. 39.

addressed his antagonist, "with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield; but I come to thee in the name of Jehovah of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied."

After this his first triumph, David's is a chequered path. The jealousy of Saul once and again attempted his life, as he played before him; then drove him from one peril to another, and into stranger and stranger places of refuge. But all the traces which remain to us of this period shew us the godly man—fearing, and remembering, and praising the Lord his God. The beautiful 34th Psalm, "I will bless the Lord at all times," containing those well known words, "O fear the Lord, all ye his saints; for there is no want to them that fear Him," and "many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the Lord delivereth him out of them all," is described in the title as "a Psalm of David, when he changed his behaviour before Abimelech: who drove him away, and he departed;" the 52nd, "Why boastest thou thyself in mischief," was written "when Doeg the Edomite came and told Saul, David is come to the house of Ahimelech;" the 54th, "Save me, O God, by thy name," "when the Ziphims came and said to Saul, Doth not David hide himself with us?" the 56th, "when the Philistines took him in Gath;" the 57th, "when he fled from Saul in the cave;" the 59th, "when Saul sent and

they watched the house to kill him ;” the 63rd, “when he was in the wilderness of Judah.” It is truly affecting to think of this last Psalm as written by the captain of a band of marauding youths, flying from hold to hold in the mountains : “ O God, thou art my God ; early will I seek thee : my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is ; to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary. Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee. Thus will I bless thee while I live : I will lift up my hands in thy name. My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness ; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips : when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches. Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice. My soul followeth hard after thee : thy right hand upholdeth me.” Nor can I doubt that to this same period belong many other Psalms, of whose date tradition has preserved no record, but which accord well with times of danger, and of trust in God for rescue. Through all, we see the same man,—him who accounted his God a reality, whose life depended, for all it had, and all it escaped, and all it desired, on the same ever gracious and ever present Protector.

But we hasten onward, and behold David

“delivered from the hand of his enemies and from the hand of Saul;” and we have in the 18th Psalm the undoubted expression of his thankfulness. I say, undoubted, because while we are beholden for our knowledge in other cases to the uncertain and in some cases demonstrably erroneous authority of the titles prefixed to the Psalms, in this we have the testimony of the 2nd Book of Samuel, in the 22nd chapter of which the whole Psalm is inserted, prefaced by, “and David spoke unto the Lord the words of this song in the day that the Lord had delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies and out of the hand of Saul.” In it we find the same cleaving to God, the same exultation in Him, the same devotion to His cause, which were the distinguishing characteristics of the man in his days of uncertainty and peril. “Jehovah is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; the God of my rock; in him will I trust: he is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower, and my refuge, my saviour; thou savest me from violence.” Here also we have him appealing to God with reference to his upright conduct in walking in His ways: “Jehovah rewarded me according to my righteousness: according to the cleanness of my hands hath he recompensed me. For I have kept the ways of Jehovah, and have not wickedly departed from my God.

For all his judgments were before me : and as for his statutes, I did not depart from them⁴.” At the time when David was settled on the throne, and God had given him rest from all his enemies, an opportunity occurred of expressing his humble gratitude to Him who had been his deliverer. God would not allow him to build a temple to His Name ; but promised that his son should build it, and delivered to him a prophecy of the sureness of his house and kingdom. “ Then,” the narrative affectingly proceeds, “ went king David in, and sat before the Lord, and he said, Who am I, O Lord God ? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto ? And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord God ; but thou hast spoken also of thy servant’s house for a great while to come. And is this the manner of man, O Lord God ? And what can David say more unto thee ? for thou, Lord God, knowest thy servant⁵.”

Nor is there any reason to suppose that such feelings, and such cleaving to God, ever ceased to characterize the main current of David’s life ; that as a man, he was found walking in God’s ways ; as a king, ruling his people prudently with all his power, by help from God and as responsible to him. This rendering of himself up to God, is the point for which Scripture puts

⁴ 2 Sam. xxii. 21—23.

⁵ 2 Sam. vii. 18 ff.

him forth as an example ; this continual regarding God's law and God's ways as the rule of his life. When Abijam, the second king of the separate kingdom of Judah, is blamed, it is said, "his heart was not perfect with Jehovah his God, as the heart of David his father⁶." When Hezekiah and Josiah are commended, we read, "he did that which was right in the sight of Jehovah, according to all that David his father did⁷."

But on this godly man's character there was one foul blot: the "matter of Uriah the Hittite." I know not an instance where the majesty of Scripture in its impartiality so strikes and awes the mind, as in this narrative. The reign of David is at its zenith of prosperity and power. David is the pattern-king of Israel; the first hero of the united nation,—whose character all were interested in upholding. Yet this sad and bloody tale is told in all its dark windings of treachery; and when it is brought to a triumphant issue, and the reader pauses to know whether his own conscience will find any echo in the sacred record, it is added, "But the thing which David had done displeased the Lord⁸." It was one of those lamentable cases, too frequent, alas, in the history of the Church of God, where the religious man becomes self-secure, and falls into the snare of the tempter.

⁶ 1 Kings xv. 3.

⁷ 2 Kings xviii. 3; xxii. 2.

⁸ 2 Sam. xi, 27.

No excuse of the time or habits of the age will for one moment palliate it. It was a gross and deep fall into sin. It was well described by the prophet Nathan, as “giving great occasion to the enemies of Jehovah to blaspheme⁹.” Well might they, when they saw David, the head and crown of God’s own people, the sweet Psalmist of Israel, the rooter of wicked doers out of the city of the Lord, himself become a profligate and a murderer. But how thoroughly characteristic is David’s penitence,—how instructive to us all! The 51st Psalm, which he uttered on this occasion, has become the deepest language of penitence to all succeeding ages. And why? Because the one point of David’s character, which distinguished him as a youth, as a king, also distinguished him as a penitent. He goes up at once to God,—“Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight. I was born in sin, and in iniquity did my mother conceive me.” Observe also how affectingly he alludes to the mournful end of his predecessor Saul, in the words, “Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me.”

Let me not forget to notice, how this sin poisoned all that was left of David’s life. Immediately, discord, incest, murder, followed in his own family¹. His son Absalom stole away

⁹ 2 Sam. xii. 14.

¹ 2 Sam. xiii. ff.

the hearts of the people—drove him from his metropolis and his throne—was slain by his nephew Joab, a wicked man, who having been David's accomplice in the murder of Uriah, thenceforward had power over him, commanding and insulting him²; and at last rebelled against him at the end of his life, with another of his sons³. Thus it is that sin finds men out—that although its guilt may be removed, its consequences are not. This, and the sin of numbering the people, are the two great blots on David's character. But the latter, though so severely visited, shrinks in comparison with this; and accordingly in a passage where a general survey of David's course is taken, we read, "David did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from any thing that He commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite⁴."

Thus then we have before us an example of an eminently godly man and good king, coupled with a very solemn warning that the best of men have a corrupt and sinful nature, and are liable at any time to fall from grace, if they forget God. How deep they may fall, none can tell. Let David's fall ever be in the mind of such of us as have God always before us, and trust to our well known and habitual religious principles

² See 2 Sam. xii. 27 ff.; xix. 5 ff.

³ 1 Kings i. 5—7.

⁴ 1 Kings xv. 5.

to keep us from sin. We should do well to remember a homely saying of Bradford, one of our martyrs of the Reformation. It is said, that on seeing a convict led to execution, he exclaimed, "But for the grace of God, there goes John Bradford." Let David's sin beget in us similar thoughts; and may no conceit of any thing great or good in us,—no spiritual pride, no amount of religious feeling or experience, ever abate our earnest endeavours to be by grace pure in heart and life,—found in the ways of God, adorning the doctrine of our Saviour in all things. At the same time, while we take warning by David, let us take example from him too. What life, and warmth, and reality is there in his faith, and hope, and love! There is here no rejection of God, as in Saul's case—even his deep unworthiness drives him to cast himself on his God more unreservedly; while every deliverance, every mercy, every promise, prompts him to sweet songs of praise to Jehovah, his rock, his tower, his fortress, his God.

Thus, beloved, let us also think of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has bestowed on us far greater mercies than David ever knew, even David's Son and Lord, God manifest in our flesh, and through Him the gift of His Holy Spirit: thus let Him be present to our daily thoughts and recognized in our daily lives. And if, through the grace of

Christ, dwelling in our hearts by faith, we are kept from disgracing our Christian profession, and escape David's fall,—O let us remember that we like him were shapen in iniquity, and that our daily sins ask for daily repentance, deep and heartfelt as his was. For neither the worst of men can escape eternal death, nor the holiest of saints attain eternal life, unless they be washed in that fountain which was opened for sin and uncleanness on the cross of Christ. This if we learn and practise, we shall not have read the history of David to no purpose, nor meditated on it this morning in vain.

SERMON VI.

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

1854.

Acts iv. 13.

“They took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.”

ONE of the plainest promises of our Lord to His disciples ran thus: “When they deliver you up, take no heed how or what ye shall speak; for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you.” And now the time was come when that promise was to be fulfilled. Their Head was taken from them. They were left to their conflict with a hostile and unbelieving world, without that voice of persuasion and that arm of power which had hitherto won, or daunted, the enemy. And here we have the account of the first outbreak of enmity against them. The Apostles, Peter and John, had at the beautiful gate of the temple, amidst a con-

course of persons, performed a miracle of healing on a lame man, above forty years old. There was no denying the fact. The man himself entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. As was natural, a crowd gathered together, marvelling, and gazing earnestly on the men, whose power had wrought so wonderful a thing. This their amazement Peter reproved—this power, for himself and his colleague, he utterly disclaimed. It was no matter of idle astonishment, he told them, but the natural result of the God of their fathers having glorified His Son Jesus: it was not their power or holiness which had made the man to walk, but His Name, through faith in His Name, which had given him this perfect soundness in the presence of them all. The grand lesson for them, was to repent and be converted to Christ—*that* Christ, to whom all their prophets had pointed,—who was the promise of the covenant with Abraham, and sent first to them the Jews, blessing them in turning away every one of them from his iniquities.

So far had Peter advanced, when the band, of whom our chapter speaks at its commencement, came upon them,—took them into custody, and brought them before the Sanhedrim. We may well conceive with what feelings that proud assembly saw the Apostles introduced before them. Over Jesus of Nazareth they had already triumphed. His reproaches of

them as hypocrites, his wonderful works which drew the people after Him, his denunciations and his prophecies, had been quenched in shame and blood. All Israel had seen the lacerated and pierced body of the pretended King of the Jews, nailed to a cross; all had heard of, and many had witnessed, his death itself. What can there be more? His followers were scattered: this imposition, at least, is over. Some misgivings there may have been, arising from the strange tales current respecting His resurrection, that all was *not* over: some workings of conscience, which even the memory of His burning words kept alive. Nor could the wonderful event of the day of Pentecost have failed to produce some effect on them, nor the result of Peter's sermon following it, the conversion to their defeated enemy of three thousand souls.

These mixed feelings we may suppose to have prevailed among them: the hope that they had put out and done with Jesus of Nazareth, dashed by a guilty and cowardly fear that His cause would rise again, and triumph over them.

The Apostles are brought in, and stand where their Master so lately stood, before the High Priest and the whole council. These two men had witnessed, alone of the apostolic band, His trial and condemnation. One of them was of the kindred of the High Priest; the other had followed with his friend. In this hall, we

may well suppose, he had thrice denied his Lord ; from the place where they now stood, had Jesus turned and looked on Peter. What solemn and self-abasing thoughts, we may imagine, entered his mind as he found himself brought now to give a second testimony ! But at the same time, how must these sad remembrances have been at once swept away and effaced by the glorious things which had happened since that night of shame and sorrow. Since then, he had seen his risen Lord once and again. Since then, he had been formally reinstated, by His divine lips, in the office which he might seem to have forfeited. Since then, he had stood forward before the hundred and twenty disciples, and pronounced to them the will and prophetic declarations of God. And above all, since then had the Holy Spirit, the promise of the Father, descended on him, and another heart had been given him. He was no longer what he had been. He was filled with the Holy Ghost. The indwelling Spirit breathed in him courage and determination. But his courage was not for himself, nor to vindicate his own character, nor to prove his own strength ;—his determination was not mere obstinacy, nor was it mere attachment to the memory of a friend, nor was it patriotism : both affections were far higher aimed, far deeper grounded, than any of these suppositions would imply.

Thus then they stand before the council ; the disciple who loved Jesus more than the rest, and the disciple whom Jesus loved ; the disciple who once wearied himself with much serving, and the disciple who sat at his Master's feet, and heard his word. They stand, and are questioned : " By what power, or by what name, have ye done this ? " Shall Peter conceal the hated name as he did before ? Then, Jesus was only on trial : now He is condemned, executed, infamous. Shall the answer now be, " I know not the man "—" by any name, rather than that one ? "

Brethren, in the whole course of history there is not a reply more sublime than that now before us. Many and wonderful have been the sayings of great men at great moments. The character of an age, the fate of an empire, the maxims which govern dynasties, have been uttered at such seasons in words of concentrated power ; from the gathered energies and solemnized thoughts and far-seeing spirits of the wise and brave, at such times, have sprung forth ready armed the truths which have led on mankind to victory. But you may search in vain, among the sayings of the wise and brave, for such an answer as this. Two Galilean fishermen,—hard-favoured, weather-stained fishermen—men who a few days ago were toiling, disappointed of their cast, braving in their little boat the night blast on the sea of Gennesaret—these

men stand before the majesty of the High Priest and the council of Israel, and answer them in this wise: "Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus of Nazareth whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at naught of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." The Church of Christ stood on her trial: and how nobly is this her first confession made: how plainly and solemnly is the Jews' rejection of Jesus contrasted with God's exaltation of Him: how decisively is the claim of Jesus to be the one only Saviour of men put forth.

The answer carried, as it well might, amazement to the minds of the council. The men before them were unlearned and ignorant: could not perchance distinguish between a deadly and a venial offence against the ceremonial law; knew none of the traditions of the fathers; nay, report said, had been known to eat with unwashed hands, and to pluck ears of corn on the Sabbath. Besides, they had passed their lives in seclusion; had been taught, if taught at all, in the poor schools of Bethsaida or Capernaum, and consorted with persons lowly and mean like themselves. Mean men, in such a presence,

are not ordinarily of such boldness in their bearing, of such boundless grasp in their claims, of such power in rebuke, and such majesty in eloquence. But one circumstance explains all. They recognized them, that THEY WERE WITH JESUS. The High Priest recognized his relative, and knew him to have been led away after "that deceiver." Others might have recognized Peter, as having been seen in the garden with Him. This one explanation was sufficient. Hence their boldness. Hence their direct appeal to the God of Israel. Hence their pointed application of the word of prophecy to the foolish builders who had rejected the stone of God's hewing. Hence their wide survey of all mankind, and assertion of Jesus of Nazareth as the only Lord and Saviour. We do not read that they sought any further for a cause. "They had been with Jesus." For what would not this account? They now only give them a charge, futile indeed as might have been expected, neither to teach nor to preach in this name any longer.

Further in the narrative I do not wish now to advance, deeply interesting as it is, and full of subjects for Christian edification and thought. Here I will take my stand this morning. THEY HAD BEEN WITH JESUS. You have seen the effect. You have seen two labouring men, plain uneducated men, standing in the forefront of God's Church as its champions: all feeble-

ness, all fear, all backwardness, laid aside: a testimony given, which for its directness and sublimity shall never again be equalled; and all, because they had been with Jesus. Knit to Him by His Spirit, they are the heirs of His promises; and in their hour of need and trial, that Spirit speaks in them. It was no heroism of Peter and John which prompted this answer, any more than it was their holiness which wrought the miracle before; it was the power of their glorified Lord which in the one case gave the healing, and in the other the words of grandeur and might; His spirit which wrought in them, and spoke in them.

“But what is all this to us? Why not speak to us of our own souls and their salvation, instead of presenting to us highly wrought scenes before the Jewish Sanhedrim, and talking to us of the sublimity of the Apostles’ answer?” Brethren, it is just BECAUSE I want to speak to you of your own souls and their salvation, that I have endeavoured to bring the spirit of this scene before you to-day. “But how can it affect us? Are we likely ever to be brought before Kings and High Priests for the confession of our faith?” God knows: probably not. But are there no other ways in which, and no other times when, we are called on to confess Him who is our Saviour and our God? Are there no presences in which we are called on to maintain Christ crucified—to stand with His

shame on us, and make it our glory? to stand and reprove those who scorn us? to stand and claim, before those who will drown the claim in their scoffs, the salvation of all men for Christ—that “no man cometh to the Father, but by Him?” And are we sufficient for these things? Have we power, have we subtlety, have we boldness, to withstand the array of unbelievers—to cast off their taunts, to repel their arguments, to put in our testimony without flinching? Are we not in this matter ignorant and unlearned men, not so wise alas in our generation as they are? How shall we meet them that come against us? There is one way, and one alone. THEY HAD BEEN WITH JESUS. And so must we be with Jesus, if we would bear a good testimony for Him in the presence of the world. To have heard of Him, to have read of Him, is not enough: we must BE WITH HIM; walk with Him in a consenting will, love Him as having first loved us, be joined to Him in one Spirit. Thus alone can consistent testimony be borne to Him by His people. They who have been with Jesus fear not the pomp, nor the scoffs, nor the threats of men. The winds may blow and the floods rise, and the rains come and beat on that house; but it shall not fall; for it is founded on a rock. A man’s religion before the world is one of those things by which his genuineness and reality as a Christian are most readily tested. And do not

mistake me, while on this point. By testimony for Christ, I do not mean an obtrusive introduction of His Name, and the doctrines of His Gospel, in all companies, and at all times: I mean a wise and prudent, but at the same time firm and uncompromising assertion of His rights and defence of His precepts and servants, when occasion requires. The Apostles were *brought* before the council,—they were *questioned*, before they gave the noble reply which I have quoted to you.

But we stand not merely in the presence of foes without—we have other and more powerful foes within. Many a man could bear testimony for Christ before a world in arms, who yet is hushed into ignominious silence in the council chamber of his own heart. There, where he forms his designs, where he gives loose to his desires and aims,—where he hopes, or fears, or loves,—his Redeemer's name is not heard, his Saviour's precepts are not alleged, his Master's example is not heeded: in every other part of his bearing he is a bold man; in other matters he is a skilful man, a man of training and usage: here only, in the central point of all his character, is he a mere child—an unlearned and ignorant man, the sport of every prejudice, every passion, every unworthy and repudiated motive. Would you find a remedy for this? Would you uplift the spiritual part of a man so that it may give bold testimony for Christ

within him—assert Christian motives, press Christian rules of action, put forward Christ as his pattern? Then must that man BE WITH JESUS: Christ must dwell in that heart by faith. Till that is so, while Christ is absent, heard of, read of, dreamed of, talked of, but not present; there will be no testimony in the heart's fountain, no Christ in the thoughts, words, actions.

Yet again, we all have to grapple with sorrows. Ere we have gone on long in life, they stand thick around us: hopes betrayed, fears realized, joys dashed with bitterness,—these are every man's companions by the way. And sorrow is a shrewd arguer, a powerful foe, a stern suggester of doubts and misbelief. Man is but an ignorant and unlearned combatant in the conflict with sorrow. Many have cast away hope, not a few life itself, for want of skill to contend with adversity. Here again, would you arm the man for a successful conflict with adversity? Would you enable him to bear a consistent testimony in the presence of sorrow? Once more, he must BE WITH JESUS. Here, above all, he requires his Saviour's presence. Hearing and reading of Him may do while the weather is fair, and the sails are set, and the sea is smooth; but when the sky is overcast, and the winds are awake, and the sail is torn, and the billows rage, we want Him in the boat to steer and to guide us. A real walking with

God will alone render a man master of sorrow—will teach him to subdue that which, like the corresponding element in nature, is the best of servants, but the worst of masters: teach him to extract the uses of adversity—to despise the fallacies which sorrows suggest to him, and cast himself on his Saviour and his only real Comforter.

We need also power to bear our testimony to Christ in prosperity. If sorrows are open foes, successes are to us enemies in disguise. Many a man has borne noble witness to his Saviour in adversity, but O how few have glorified Him in the broad sunshine of wealth, and preferment, and worldly estimation. When the Christian martyrs were brought to their trial, it was the custom of their persecutors to try not merely tortures to shake their constancy—these only a few craven dispositions heeded—but also to tempt them by the offer of advancement, of lands and houses, of rank and honours, in case of apostacy. And the father of persecutors follows the same plan. “All these will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.” It is perhaps the greatest and noblest example of the power of divine grace which we are here permitted to witness, when we see a man, undazzled by rank and wealth and power, walking with his eye fixed on God, along that high and giddy track which rocks to the peals of popular applause, and thrills with the curse

of the multitude—when we see a man able to meet the fallacies suggested by success and influence—humble, where others are proud—kindly and self-denying, where so many are hard and self-indulgent—a worshipper of God not from policy, but from earnestness; charitable, not because and in so far as it is expected, but from the love of Christ constraining him; having much, and bestowing much; blessed himself, and an example and blessing to society and the wide world. And how may this be done? How shall the man of wealth, how shall the magistrate, how shall the statesman, render this noble and fearless testimony to the Saviour of sinners, to the Master of his talents and time? Only in one way—only on one condition. That way is the way of reality—that condition, communion with his Lord for himself. “They took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.” How different is the decent toleration of religion by those in wealth and power, the respectable patronizing of God and his service and his people, the worldly-prudent care not to commit themselves too far with the Church, to grasp the world in one hand and just touch the refuge with the other,—how widely different from the genuine Christian character, whose fountains gush evermore within, which is found always fearless on the side of God and good, submitting to obloquy if need be, enduring hardness as a good soldier of

Christ. And there is nothing short of being with Jesus, that will create such a character. You cannot put it on—it must result from the gradual accretion of many experiences, many trials, many failures, many prayers, years spent under the eye and within the sound of the voice of the Saviour. You cannot build it up on the shifting sands of fashion, or on the soft and tempting soil of self-indulgence: its foundations must be on the holy hills, or it will never stand.

But let us all remember, that we have yet more solemn conflicts to wage—yet more decisive testimonies to bear. There will come a day, when each one here present will be called on to wrestle with the last foe: to bear, in the presence of his past life, and in the presence of those who are to outlive him, his witness to Christ. Do we desire that that witness shall be nobly borne—that our words at that hour shall be like the Apostles' answer, words of confidence and of courage? The circumstances indeed of "that inevitable day" are beyond our control, and lie in His hand who holds the issues of life and death; but its result lies with ourselves. Would we meet death fearless, and in humble assurance that we have a part in One who has robbed him of his terrors? There is but one way, and that way is, to have BEEN WITH JESUS during our lives here. In that hour, it is not uncommon for the Enemy to

come in like a flood. The sins of days past, the terrors of judgment to come, crowd on the failing sight; and what man is sufficient for these things? But the disciples of Christ have One with them, who is stronger than all that can be against them. The Spirit of the Lord dwelling in them shall lift up a standard against the assaults of the Foe: the assailant of their souls shall take knowledge of them that they have been with Jesus: the storm shall be still at His word, and they shall pass tranquilly into the haven where they would be. O there is nothing but the reality of the Christian life, which can ensure the peace of the Christian's death.

But one more trial awaits the sons of men—one more testimony to be borne, not indeed *by* them, but *of* them. "AFTER THAT, THE JUDGMENT." We shall all be detected before the judgment-seat of Christ; our secret thoughts uncovered; the real man laid open, as he has been in those inner parts, which no eye has witnessed, no friend has ever shared. Then, dear brethren, who are they that shall escape the wrath of the Judge? Who are they, whom the crash of falling worlds shall strike unmoved and fearless? There, amidst the assembled myriads, will be found a multitude whom no man can number, who have lived in Christian holiness and in the faith of their Saviour—who have washed their robes and made them white

in the blood of the Lamb. Angels and men shall take knowledge of them, THAT THEY HAVE BEEN WITH JESUS. Poor and weak and mean and unlearned many of them may have been—their names unknown on earth—but they shall stand in that day unabashed, with One to answer for them; their names are known in heaven, for they are written in the book of life. They loved their Redeemer here—they walked with Him—they served Him, they confessed Him, and He will not deny them there. They shall be led to the King with shouts of angelic triumph: they shall pass into His presence in the city of God—they shall live in sweet communion with each other, and Him, and His holy angels, and in high rapture of unwearied obedience and unlimited knowledge and perfect love, for ever and ever.

Do you, dear friends, as the Pilgrim at the end of his Progress, “wish yourselves in among them?” O then let us, let all men, see that you spend your lives with Jesus: cast aside all by-ends and secondary motives, and render yourselves up to Him in singleness of spirit.

SERMON VII.

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

1854.

MATT. XXV. 6.

“At midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh: go ye out to meet him.”

I AM not about to enter to-day on the full explanation of this parable, as it stands in its place, a part of the last great prophetic discourse of our Lord. Such an explanation would be important for us all, and I may hope, please God, to attempt it at some future time in our afternoon expositions, which are especially dedicated to setting forth to you the context and coherence of Scripture. But at present I confine myself to the spiritual application of the parable, taking only so much of it as is necessary to make that lesson distinct and clear. The lesson is, the duty of WATCHFULNESS, arising out of our ignorance of the time when the divine dealings with us will be accomplished. This

our Lord enforces and illustrates by a history easily understood by those who heard Him. There were ten virgins, who were waiting to join a bridal procession. It was night. Their part was to carry lamps before the bridegroom to the marriage feast. Provided with these lamps ready kindled, they wait while the bridegroom tarries. Here let us for a moment pause, and examine the scene before us. Our Lord likens the kingdom of heaven, *i. e.*, in fact, the Church, to these ten virgins. They have come forth to meet the bridegroom. They represent the company of the Church of Christ, come forth from the world, and waiting for their Bridegroom, the Saviour, to appear. But here a question meets us: are these virgins to be taken as corresponding to the whole visible multitude of the baptized, the spiritual and the unspiritual alike, the converted and the unconverted? Because this has been sometimes supposed, and the parable interpreted accordingly. But the further we look into it, the more we shall be persuaded that such cannot be the case. All these virgins have their lamps with them, burning brightly when they set out to meet the bridegroom. Had he come at that moment, all would have entered in with him. Their loins were girt and their lights burning, and they themselves as persons who waited for their Lord. Clearly then they are not the worldly and careless, the dead in trespasses and

sins, but converted godly souls, with the candle of the Lord lit up within them by God's Spirit. They have come forth from the world; they walk by faith in an unseen, an expected Bridegroom; they are hoping and waiting for the salvation of the Lord. The children of this world know of no Bridegroom to come. Within them no lamp has been kindled to throw its ray down the waste of years, and point out a day when He that shall come will come, and will not tarry. So that to regard any of these virgins as indicating the unawakened and unconverted, is a great mistake;—just one of those mistakes prevalent among shallow readers of Scripture, which have so often robbed the church in general of the special instruction and peculiar point of our Lord's parables.

The ten virgins then represent THE PEOPLE OF THE LORD, awakened by the Spirit, separate from the world, looking for His coming. But among these there is a wide distinction. Some were wise,—prudent, circumspect; others were foolish, improvident, unthrifty. And in what was this shewn? The improvident, although they took their lamps, DID NOT TAKE WITH THEM OIL whereby those lamps might be fed. The prudent TOOK OIL IN THEIR VESSELS WITH THEIR LAMPS. At the moment of going forth, all were alike: but with reference to the future, how different! The one party thought within themselves, if they thought on the subject at all, that the

lights once kindled would always burn ; once converted to God, once the religious profession put on, once come out of the world, all was well : “ Why look forward ? why make provision for the distant and uncertain future ? ” Or perhaps they were full of their expectations of the bridegroom’s arrival : “ Surely he will not tarry—what need of long preparation for that, which promise and prophecy point to as speedily to come ? ” Or, as I hinted, perhaps they thought not about the matter. They rejoiced in the brightness of their present light—they had joy and peace in believing—as for the Lord’s coming, it would be in His time ;—why should they strain their sight into the mist of prophecy ? why should they make their hearts sick with hope deferred ? Why should they not cast aside the dim and uncertain, and rest contented with things surely revealed ? Of all these follies in religion, the *first* is that to which our Lord here would have our attention more especially directed : the folly of thinking, that because the lamp of God’s Spirit has been once lit within us, it will always burn on, without care or nurture. That this is a folly of the most fatal kind, the nature of the case itself will shew us. For remember, that all through the Christian’s life, the outward influences of the world, the inward temptations of the flesh, the spiritual attacks of the devil, are ever working to extinguish the light which is kindled within

him; that to maintain that light is a struggle against nature, against habit, against inclination. How then can it be maintained without continued conflict and effort? How, without daily application to the source of all grace? Foolish indeed then is that Christian, however earnest, however thoroughly convinced of sin and righteousness and judgment by the Spirit's inner agency, who does not make every provision and value every opportunity to keep alive the work once begun.

But some also were wise, provident, circumspect. They saw all this which the others overlooked. They remembered that the flame now burning so bright and clear, would need renewal. They bethought them, that the Bridegroom might tarry; that the day and hour of His appearing were regulated, not even by His own will, but by the arrangements of His Father in heaven. They knew their own weakness—they distrusted their power to be ever watchful,—always on the stretch of expectation, and ready for His approach. What if He came in one of their hours of infirmity, when the lamp was low and dim, yea even flickering in the socket? What if He came in the tempest, when the rude wind would buffet their lamp, and none but a steady well-fed flame would endure? All this must be provided for; and they were prudent, and made the provision. They took oil in their vessels with their lamps. They had

with them an ever-present, ever-ready supply. And herein was their wisdom. And wise indeed is that Christian who goes and does likewise; to whom all means and opportunities of grace are precious; who does not say within himself, "Once the Lord's, always the Lord's," but prays, and strives, and presses onwards, that he may be found in Him at his coming—that however feeble and intermitted the ordinary burning of the lamp be, there may be so deep and rich and inexhaustible a store of divine grace ever accessible, laid up by long and earnest and dearly-bought experience, and communion with God, that he may at any moment rise and trim his lamp, and go forth with joy to meet his Lord.

But meanwhile how are these virgins employed? Doubtless you will say, the prudent are ever on the watch: ever at their post, looking out into the night; ever feeding their lamps, lest they should be found failing at the last moment. So might some human teacher have framed the parable: but not so did He, who knows what is in man; whose words, wonderful in their depth as in their clearness, set forth all our nature in its realities, that they may lay hold of its realities. "While the Bridegroom tarried, THEY ALL SLUMBERED AND SLEPT." *All?* Yes, brethren; and it is said, not with blame expressed or implied, but merely as a matter of fact. Their waiting was a state

of slumber;—dreams were their realities—their real state and interests forgotten. And what is the life of God's people in this world, what is their waiting for the coming of their Lord, but a slumbering and a sleeping? What are the things which are real to them, about which are their daily interests and fears and hopes, but the dreams of this state of time? Where are the realities of eternity? Where, but heard fitfully, as the sleeper hears the clock tolling the night hour, and turns him to slumber again? What is the most zealous, the most energetic of God's people, but a slumberer and a sleeper, compared with that character of entire devotion to things unseen, which should be His? How very far is the holiest saint who has ever adorned the Church below, from the lowliest of the angels of God, who are proposed to us as our pattern in doing His will! Truly, when we speak of the History of the Church of Christ, of her obedience to His dying commands, of her missionary exertions, of her letting her own light shine before men, we may well substitute for that term the SLUMBER of the Church; for we have indeed, through all these long ages during which the Bridegroom has tarried, been slumbering and sleeping: weak in faith, wavering in hope, cold in love; timid and slothful for Christ, and earnest only for self and the world.

At midnight, when the world least expected, when the church was slumbering the deepest,

when darkness had settled down the thickest over men, “there was a cry made, **BEHOLD THE BRIDEGROOM COMETH: GO YE OUT TO MEET HIM.**” O brethren, what a cry will that be! We all know what it is to expect, what it is to receive, some important and decisive intelligence: what a tide it turns in the life of individuals and nations—how hope and fear, and joy and anguish, obey its behest, and go forth far and wide to their work! O how then will it be, when the great news once goes forth over the world, “The Lord is here!” When men come crying in our streets, no enthusiasts, no dupes of others, but earnest men of fact, full of living realities, and proclaiming, “The Bridegroom cometh!”

Well, the cry was made:—and “all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps.” Ready to meet Him none were;—the lamps of all wanted trimming. Life cannot ever be kept up to the tension of its most solemn requirements: but happy they, who have that within, or have access to that above, which will, when the hour comes, repair the wasted oil. And so was it with the wise virgins. Their store of oil fed their lamps, and they were speedily bright for their work. Not so however with those others, once equally earnest with them: “The foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil, for our lamps are going out¹.” O what a time

¹ This, and not “are gone out,” is obviously the right rendering of the present tense *σβέννυνται*.

for the lamp to be going out, when the Bridegroom was in sight! In that moment, which requires the concentrated result of a holy life, the assurance of long experience, the confidence of intimate communion, grace has to be sought, the tie between God and the soul knit up afresh! Is it a time to be laying the foundation, when the Lord of the temple is come to fill the house with His glory? Is it a time to be learning lessons of theology, and turning over Bibles, and being taught how to pray, when that which is perfect is come, and that which is in part is done away? The eyes of Christ's saints should be bright with hope fulfilled at that day—"Lo, this is our God—we have waited for Him;"—no cold lessons to learn—no faltering prayers—no toiling upward and onward then,—but the last eager bound of the emancipated spirit to the goal of all its desires and joys:—and what have we instead? The Saviour's glory is unveiled: but the eye that should feed on it is glued to the dust. The heavenly prize glitters within reach: but the hand that should grasp it is paralyzed. The wedding feast is prepared: but the white robe is soiled, and torn, and mislaid. O woe unto us, if we be of the number of these unthrifty and faithless ones—these daylight believers and midnight defaulters—these easily converted but hardly retained—these who receive the Spirit but as a guest that tarrieth

in them for a day, not as their abiding Comforter, and sanctifier, and guide! For they that were ready went in with the bridegroom to the marriage—and the door was shut. I enter not now on the minute details of this latter part of the parable, believing it to have a distinct prophetic reference, which I may at another time explain. I only take its greater features. The wise, the provident, entered into the joy of their Lord: the foolish, the improvident, were shut out. O what labour was here lost, what bitter disappointment incurred! It availed them nothing that they had been once under the teaching of the Spirit, that they had loved their Saviour, that they had come out of the world at his call: they had put their hand to the plough, and looked back: they had loved their own ease, or bye-paths and studies, or the excitement of controversy, or the idle tattle of the religious world, better than nourishing their spiritual life by feeding on Christ; they had talked and argued about baptism, but had never been bound by their own baptismal covenant; they had run after one preacher, and censured another preacher, and heard to praise, and to wonder, and to cavil, and to denounce, but had never *lived* by any preacher, nor heard to profit thereby. They had held themselves high in the visible church—counted themselves for the one little flock of God, and despised others; declaimed loudly of vital error—de-

nounced whole communities and anathematized differing churches; had cast about hard names in their eager zeal without knowledge,—had striven to defend their outpost of the fortress of the truth by hedging it about with thorns, instead of helping the feeble knees to climb its upward pathways: and now they find that the last are first—that the feeble have outstripped them—that the publicans and sinners, and heretics in their esteem, have gained the glorious summit, while they are left hopelessly behind.

But let us come nearer home, and speak to our own hearts and lives. “The Bridegroom cometh”—once for all this cry shall be made to the whole church. But once also it is made to each of Christ’s people. It will cost no violent transfer of the parable, but merely an individual application of it, to regard each one of us who knows Christ as his Master and Saviour, as thus come out of the world and waiting for Him; and to look on this summoning us out of this world into His presence, as the time when the cry is made, “Behold the Bridegroom cometh.” And let me for an instant remind you of that which will, I am persuaded, clothe what I have yet to say with greater solemnity, and give my words further access into all your hearts. How often of late in this our city, to how many, and how unexpectedly, has this cry been made! How especially does it behove all of us at this time to look up the things that

remain, that nothing be wanting—that we may be found of Him in peace at his coming !

Let us address those here present who have come out of the world, and are waiting for Christ. To you especially does this parable speak. Within you the light has been kindled. You know what sin is—you have been taught by the Holy Spirit the heinousness of unbelief on Christ: you have looked on Him as made your righteousness; you have taken some lessons from the Spirit in the school of heavenly wisdom. This is your condition; and now the Bridegroom is tarrying; years are passing; you are engaged in the busy cares and occupations of life; you are dreaming your dreams, slumbering and sleeping, as compared to what men in earnest should be doing. But this is true of us all; it is the infirmity of our flesh, which is weak, while the spirit is willing. My question is another: Have you OIL IN YOUR VESSELS WITH YOUR LAMPS? Is the inward light of life in God, and is the outward light of good works before men, not only kindled, but maintained, earnestly and consistently? Are you, as time goes on, not only not backsliding from your God, but advancing,—laying up store against the evil day—against the solemn day of trial which is at hand for us all? And mind I am not asking a mere question of form, to be answered by saying, “ I keep my church and my sacraments, I read my Bible and practise pri-

vate and family and public prayer." I am rejoiced to hear it: yet I want not to know this, but to be informed something about the *result* of all these. You have recourse to the means,—but do you attain the end? You frequent the ordinances of grace; but do you gain the grace itself? When the Bridegroom comes,—the wise will be, not those who merely had oil vessels and carried them about and kept them clean and bright, but those who had OIL IN THEM, wherewith to feed their lamp. There will be no enquiry then, what sort of vessel held the precious nutriment: one may have carried it in gold, or silver, or costly ware; another in the unshapen potsherd, or in the hollow of his hand; but grace is grace, wherever found and however borne, and all grace is of the Father of our Lord Jesus, the Father of lights,—and all grace alike feeds the lamp of the divine life, and all grace alike leads to glory.

"FIVE were wise, and FIVE were foolish." Can it be, that so many converted men shall fall through, and miss the mark? O what a solemn lesson for us, who count ourselves all but sure of heaven, and think the work done because it has been begun! Well may we teach our children to say, "I thank my heavenly Father that He hath called me into this state of salvation, through Jesus Christ our Saviour; and I pray unto Him to give me His grace that

I may continue in the same unto my life's end." Yes, dear brethren, let us all strive, and pray, and practise our heavenly Father's will, and be found in His ways, growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; and then, though He may come in the hour of our infirmity, though He may come in the whirlwind of His wrath on the world, the cry to us will be one of unspeakable joy—"The BRIDEGROOM cometh!" He who is to us the chief among ten thousand,—the desire of our souls; Whom not having seen, we love—Whom when we wake up and behold, we shall be forever satisfied.

SERMON VIII.

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY, BEING
THE THANKSGIVING DAY FOR THE ABUNDANT
HARVEST.

1854.

PSALM ci. 1.

“I will sing of mercy and judgment: unto thee, O Lord, will
I sing.”

OF mercy and judgment. And who among us has not the same mingled strain to utter? Who can say that his mercies have not been tempered with the gentle but solemn reminders of judgment at God's hand? Whose flowery wreath has not contained the twig of cypress? or if not that, some bitter herb or other, to prevent the odour being all of sweetness? Our very proverbs tell us of this—no day without its cloud—no rose without its thorn. And who can say, on the other hand, that his judgments have not been most tenderly mixed with mercies? Who is there, that looking back on the

vale of misery, does not find that when he passed through it the wells were filled with water for his refreshment? The bitterest passage of our lives, our deepest and most hopeless bereavement, our most entire dejection of spirit, do not blessings gather round its memory as years pass on? Have we not become wiser as well as sadder by its occurrence? Nay, besides this, are we not enabled to perceive, when we can look calmly on it, many a palliating circumstance, many a merciful arrangement of our God? Or if it still appear dark and unrelieved, as long as we are seeing in part here below, does not time bring to light other and compensating dispensations of Providence towards us, of whose presence we were not then conscious, though we were cheered and consoled by their effects? Our song may well then be of mercy and judgment: of His dealings towards us, who, when He blesses, also chastises, lest we should forget Him: who, when He chastises, also blesses, lest we should distrust Him.

And will this mingled strain be silent, when judgments shall cease, and all be mercy? Will not the song of the redeemed be also of mercy and judgment? Of mercy first indeed—of fullest, richest, most undeserved mercy to the chief of sinners—mercy unbounded, inexpressible—filling eternity with praise:—but there will be many a note of plaintive remembrance uttered in heaven; many a sweet minor chord

interwoven in the music of those who stand about the throne:—they too will sing of judgment. They will love to trace the wonders of their Father's hand—to see the windings and the rough places of that way by which he has led them, through much tribulation, to the kingdom.

Of mercy and of judgment—it is the united song of the church triumphant and the church below. Let us see whether we cannot interweave our theme of to-day in this grand chorus of heaven and earth, and bear our part in the praise of the great multitude which no man can number.

We too will sing of mercy and of judgment. Of mercy, such as surely no people have ever before received at the hand of God—so blessedly timed, so graciously and bountifully bestowed:—of mercy, in the midst of judgment. Early in this year, whose faith was not severely tried? Who could look forward without trembling, when of God's three severest judgments,—war, pestilence, and famine,—the first was already upon us, wider in grasp, more mysterious in character, more uncertain in result, than any that had been before—the second had shewn itself among us, and was only too well known to be lurking in ambush in our neglected streets, and waiting but its season to come forth and destroy—and the third lay entirely in His hand who commands the seasons, a

matter of anxious hope or fear — so anxious indeed and so serious, that if but a blight, such as half our summers witness, had fallen on our fields,—nay, if their yield had proved but an ordinary one, the consequences to our people must have been most disastrous. And what have we now to record? We have not indeed wholly escaped His judgments: war yet remains, with all its dread uncertainties, its lamentable sacrifices, and its households yet to be made mourners: but hitherto God has prospered us in our just and merciful contest. All that we could desire at His hands, short of making the judgment of war into no judgment, we have received. In actual warfare, our successes have as yet been constant, our losses trifling¹: and we look to the future undismayed, and trusting to His continued help and blessing. And with regard to the second object of our anxiety, if we must here speak again of judgment, has not here also mercy predominated? Grievous as have been, grievous as still are, our losses by the pestilence, what are they compared to what they might have been—what, compared to what they have been elsewhere? What is the death-roll of London to that of Messina? What have been the losses of our gallant troops compared even with those of their foreign comrades? And if we turn to our

¹ The very day that this sermon was preached, the news of the battle of the Alma arrived in London.

own local experience, we may well sing of mercy prevailing over judgment. While other districts have counted their victims by hundreds, scarce ten in the whole have been taken from among us since the first outbreak of the disease. And now we have all reason to believe that God is withdrawing the scourge from us: that its steps are slowly retreating, and soon we shall cease to hear of its presence. Then, with regard to the third great object of our anxiety, need I say that here all has been mercy, un-mixed with judgment? Converse with whom we will, read what we will, travel where we will, the same unvarying report meets us: that we have been blessed with one of the most bountiful harvests ever remembered. And let us reflect what a combination of providential mercies must be brought about for such a result to happen. A favourable seed-time, a favourable winter, a favourable passage through the often tedious and disappointing months of spring, a favourable blossom, a favourable time for the setting of the corn in the ear, warmth and sunshine for the ripening, reaping, and housing the precious grain — all these must concur, in a climate so variable, so defeating all calculation and prophecy, as our own, to raise the result above an average harvest. During all the year, there must be the absence of blight, or of what is called absolutely unseasonable weather. And this year, such a

concurrence has been found, unmarked except by those who were interested in the matter: first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear came forth, unchecked and unblighted; till even the casual observer might see, as he travelled on, the fields full from hedge to hedge of the even and regular grain. And then it might occur to him, while his heart glowed with the richness of this abundant promise, how many risks were yet to be undergone, before we could call it ours; how often our sheaves have lain out through weeks of disappointing rain, till the harvest became a heap in the day of desperate sorrow. But God has healed all our fears, and quieted all our anxieties, in the most signal and remarkable manner. During a succession of bright and splendid days, which seemed more of heaven than of earth, field after field was gathered in, till many literally had not where to bestow their stores. And if an anxious thought still remained, how it might be, after all this clear sunshine in the late summer, with those in our less genial northern counties, whose harvest must be gathered in the advancing autumn,—our heavenly Father has again interposed with His mercy, and granted us, after a few refreshing showers, this second season of bright and cloudless weather, during which our northern harvests are going forward as prosperously as those of the south before. Whichever way we look, there is mercy; remark-

able, in each of its separate particulars; but wonderful indeed, in so rare and perfect a combination of them all. Already we hear rumours, necessarily vague of course, but at the same time not to be entirely slighted, as coming from those well versed in such matters, of the immense sums which have been saved to us in this our season of extraordinary exertion and exercise, by the signal bounty of God's providence. Already the world has begun to sing of mercy and judgment; to tell us how the vast outlay of the war to which we exhorted one another last spring as a burden to be borne cheerfully and resolutely, has been virtually diminished, or even something like compensated to us, by the treasures of our fields.

Yes, brethren, but the world's song of mercy and judgment is a very different strain from the Christian's song of mercy and judgment. The world, in fact, sees not mercy on the one side, nor judgment on the other. The Fountain from which all blessings flow is unknown to the ungodly man. For all that he believes or puts forth in his practice, the germinating power of the seed, the nourishing elements of the soil, the fostering rain, the ripening sunshine, are the results of a fortuitous concourse of blind particles of matter, jumbled together in the chaos of chance. For all that he says or does, or teaches others, war and pestilence have no overruling causes but the conflicts of human

passions, and the neglects of human selfishness. And do not say to me, “ You are dealing in exaggerated common places—you are repeating the pulpit phrases of your evangelical friends—the world is better than you think.” Do not say this to me—for it is not, O it is not the truth. It is my earnest wish to cast aside common places and pulpit phrases—to speak of things not as you expect me to speak of them, but as I find them really to be : to deal out to you not a conventional Christianity, cut and dried to suit the fashion of the religious world or the irreligious world, but the Christianity which believes in a living and present Saviour and God, and sees Him employed in all the good and ill that chequer life. Well, and this I say the world does not do. I mix with men of the world, I hear their unguarded speeches, I read their books ; and I do not find an acknowledgment of a living and ever present Saviour and God. I am compelled to infer from the only data open to me, that behind those brows of serious prudent thought, there does not live and stir the thought of Him who made and redeemed them. I see their ordinary behaviour when He is mentioned or when He should be served ; I mark whence their shafts of raillery spring, and where they are meant to alight ; and I infer, that the worldly men whom I address here, and who are found every where in this busy city, would scorn, in their common every day practice,

to recognize, and look up to, and ask real things from, a living, working, ordaining, God. O brethren, with such men, what is prayer? Is it a mighty engine of God's own constructing, able to move the hand that moves the world? And are these rich blessings of which we have been speaking looked on or talked of as answers to prayer? O no, far from it; such a view would be superstition, such a way of speaking would betoken a weak or ill-ordered mind. Prayer with such persons is a mere convenient and comely toy, not a whit better than that of which the traveller tells us, wound up and let down to quiet men's consciences, without any reference to expenditure of human desire and toil, or expectation of a result to follow.

And it is because such persons abound, and ever will abound among us, that we are exhorted on such occasions as these, to sing, not of fair and foul chance, but of mercy and judgment; mercy, from One who shews mercy; judgment, from One who exercises judgment. It is for this reason that we must not keep our thoughts to ourselves at such seasons, but are bound as a Christian nation and as Christian individuals, to cry aloud and say, "See what the Lord hath done;" "see what prayer has effected;" see how graciously He is tempering trial, and toil, and adversity, and war, with repose, and prosperity, and peace.

But it is said "are we not much improved in

this respect ?” Thank God, we are. Two-and-twenty years ago, when this pestilence first visited our shores, I remember that the proposal, then unwonted and strange, of a general fast, was met with a shout of derision in our national legislature. Now, whatever objections there might be to the proposal at any particular time, the man who ventured to deride it at any time would be marked with the deserved stigma of public disgrace. For this, I am deeply thankful ; but I also know, that the danger of all our times of gradual improvement is, our standing and congratulating ourselves. We are indeed, as I hope and trust, escaping from the city of destruction ; fleeing, our nation, our parishes, our families, from the deep and abandoned ungodliness of the age gone by ; but O remember Lot’s wife ; fix your eyes on the mark and press forward ; say not “ We have much improved,” except as an encouragement to improve yet more, and a cause of thankfulness to Him who has brought us thus far. Let us strive to acknowledge God more and more in all our ways, as ever present, real and living in His works and arrangements around us.

And to this end, let us endeavour to make use of the present wonderful manifestation of His mercies combined with His judgments, to shew our sense of His presence, and our humility and thankfulness towards Him. And this, knowing where we stand : that we are, among

the nations of this world, His foremost witnesses. And remember, that while we speak, as necessarily to-day, mostly of temporal mercies, it is not with the cold recognition of the deist, but with the earnest and lively gratitude of Christians. We know of NO MERCIES OUT OF CHRIST. In Him we have every blessing. In Him, God gives us all things freely to enjoy. It is His Satisfaction, which has caused the Father to smile on this our world: His blood, which has cleansed creation from its defilement. It is for Him that the course of this world is being ordered: every advance of our species in civilization, in knowledge, in moral and spiritual practice, is but a step in the wonderful process, by which the Father is putting all things under His feet. Wars and contests, undertaken for human ambition, are His ways of bringing about purposes of which the actors in them never dreamed. All this the Christian bears in mind. His own part, as a disciple of his Lord, is humbly to trace His hand, and wait for His salvation, glorifying Him meanwhile in the business of life; in every thing giving thanks: rejoicing in hope: patient in tribulation, continuing instant in prayer. Thus, whether his heavenly Father is pleased, as to-day, to open the windows of heaven and pour out largely of His bounties, or to shut up His loving-kindness in apparent displeasure—though his human spirit will necessarily exult in the one

case, and feel depression in the other, yet in both cases there will be the same chastened submission to God's will, as far removed from mere fatalism as it is from presumption, arising from a knowledge that whatever he is called on to do or to suffer is a part of his Father's plan respecting him,—a portion of the discipline necessary to train him for glory,—a department of the work which He has given him to do on earth. Thus he passes his life, with the song of mercy and judgment ever in his heart and on his lips: glorifying God in his thoughts, and glorifying Him by confession and in practice before men.

And this leads us finally to say, that the joy of the Christian in God's mercies thus tempering His judgments, is never a barren joy: never only an inward feeling, a mere paroxysm of selfish exultation: but out of it ever springs from the fountain of his inner life the question, "WHAT SHALL I RENDER TO THE LORD FOR ALL HIS MERCIES TO ME?" And the question rests not answerless. Poor indeed is the gratitude—vain, and worse than vain, the religion,—which on a day like this stops short at coming here and offering the service of the lips. Real thankfulness will never rest with this. "What can I do to-day to shew my gratitude to my God?" will be the enquiry of every one here, who really feels how gracious He has been in bringing about all this combination of cir-

cumstances on our behalf. And to this enquiry we have endeavoured to supply you a practical answer. What could be more appropriate, considering our present situation of recent escape from pestilence, than that we should pour out the offerings which shall testify our thankfulness, into the treasury of one of those noble institutions which care for the diseased and afflicted? Into the circumstances of that particular hospital I will not now enter further than to say, that it urgently needs ready and substantial help for the great work which is continually before it,—and that that work is one to which every man, and every Christian should be eager and thankful to contribute his aid.

Thus then let us testify to the Lord our deep sense of His abundant loving-kindness:—not with the formal dole, which carries with it no feeling and costs no exertion, but with the large and generous offerings of hearts inly stirred; with the self-denial of those who would fain spend and be spent in His service, who spent Himself that they might live, and crowns even the temporal part of that life with unnumbered blessings.

SERMON IX.

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

1854.

EZEK. xiv. 8; xx. 38.

“Ye shall know that I am the Lord.”

SUCH is the solemn burden with which the prophet Ezekiel closes almost every paragraph of his prophecy: the proposed result of all the judgments denounced and all the mercies promised by God through his ministration. Let us take these words for our subject to-day. A result so announced, so repeated, cannot be unimportant.

Israel had for ages been the Lord's peculiar people. He had manifested Himself to them repeatedly by signs and wonders. He had interfered visibly at various periods of their history, for their good or for His glory. In Egypt, He heard their cry of misery: He visited their oppressors with plagues, and gave them a deliverer. In the wilderness, He went before

them in a pillar of cloud and of fire. He drove out the nations of Canaan, and planted them in. He raised them up judges and kings. But their whole course had been one of rebellion against Him. And in the days when these words were written, He had brought to pass a portion of his often-repeated threatenings, and was beginning to send them into captivity into distant lands. A hundred and thirty years before this, the kingdom of Israel had ceased to be, because they obeyed not the voice of the Lord their God, but transgressed His covenant. And now the sword was hanging over Judah. Every year witnessed some new insolence and encroachment on the part of the Assyrian: every year some new humiliation of the house of David. The successors of the wide-ruling Solomon were now nearly confined to their metropolis and its neighbourhood. “How are the mighty fallen,” might already have been the plaintive song of the maidens of Judah. But worse was yet to come. Degradation is always a steep declivity; and the Lord’s people were doomed to reach its very depth. It was His intent to raze to the ground the place where He had put His name: to destroy their holy and beautiful house, where their fathers had worshipped, and where His glory had had so often appeared. A few years passed after Ezekiel uttered these words, and in the affecting language of the Chronicles of Judah, “He brought

upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age; he gave them all into his hand¹.” O what a day was that, when along the hills and valleys of Judah moved the melancholy procession, the remnant of the chosen people, into bitter captivity, urged on by cruel foemen from behind, leaving their weary and their sick to die as they went. Well may we ask,—where are the ancient promises? where the covenant made with Abraham, the blessing to come through him on all families of the earth? where the oath sworn unto David, the kingdom of which there is to be no limit nor end? Wherefore, O wherefore, hath the Lord dealt thus with this great people? He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men for their hurt: what cause then can there have been, lying deep in the secrets of His purposes, worth this vast infliction of misery, this vast expenditure of glory, and of precious lives themselves? Our text, brethren, reads us the solemn answer. YE SHALL KNOW THAT I AM THE LORD. To instil this knowledge into the nation as a nation, and into its individual members, was so heavy a judgment sent.

And when we come seriously to consider the matter, shall we not find that it is a lesson

¹ 2 Chron. xxxvi. 17.

WORTH KNOWING AT ANY PRICE—at the price of home and comfort, of wealth and vigour, yea of life itself, if need be? For let us think on the importance of this knowledge,—to know that God is the Lord. On this, in a rational and responsible being, all real and enduring happiness depends. God is the author of his life, the only satisfying object of his soul's desire. On communion with Him, on grace derived from Him, on growing in likeness to Him, depend both his present and his advancing power for good. To know Him, not only leads on to eternal life, but it is eternal life itself. Those who have not this knowledge, whatever else they may know, are ignorant as regards the true and highest wisdom. If trouble comes, they know not how to interpret it: if danger, they have no refuge: sickness brings to them depression; death, despair. Be they ever so wealthy, they are never rich,—for they know not the true use of wealth, to be expended for God's glory: whatever they do, they do it in vain,—spending their labour for that which is not bread, and which cannot satisfy.

And let us endeavour to sketch the boundaries of this knowledge, and give some idea of its nature, and how it is brought about.

Man, of himself, has it not—he requires teaching it. None of us were born into the world with this knowledge; nor should we, if left to ourselves, ever have attained to it. Our

desires were not towards it, but away from it. The language of the natural heart to God has ever been, "Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." Moreover it is not a knowledge which any education, however complete, could confer upon us. Education may teach the knowledge of God's works; may make a man conversant with the interesting and glorious details of creation, but it cannot teach the knowledge of God Himself. It may teach the wonderful lessons of history, which is the course of God's providence; it may open the page of Scripture, teach its original languages and inner coherence, and bring a man, so to speak, constantly within the sound of the divine voice, speaking as never man spake. But none of these are the knowledge of God Himself; and you may and often do find the accomplished natural philosopher, the accurate and experienced historian, the minute biblical scholar, yet in total ignorance of the knowledge implied in those words, "Ye shall know that I am the Lord." Such a man may live on in sincere respect for the religion of his country,—live on in blameless life before his fellow-men,—be found regular and devout at church and in private,—and yet the lesson, that THE LORD IS HIS GOD, may never have been brought home in the power of the Spirit to his life and conscience. And without this conviction, he lives, and dies, a degraded and unhappy being, cut off from the

source of man's life, and from the great centre of man's desires and energies. In every congregation there are multitudes in the situation which I have been describing; living without God in the world; talking about God, surmising about God, yea *patronising* God, for decency or for conscience sake, but never SERVING God; never regarding Him as a living, present, paramount Lord of their spirits, never setting Him on the throne of their hearts, or doing homage to Him in their secret thoughts.

Now let me for a moment ask you to compare those whom I have been describing, with the true, really convinced, servants of God. Draw the contrast as strong as you like; let your ungodly man be amiable, gentle, cultivated, benevolent, in high place, if you will—accumulate upon him all that the world can bestow, under the most favourable circumstances as regards outward weal, and inward disposition and spirits—but let this one thing, the fear of God, be wanting; let our example be one of those who passes through life with every good motive but the highest, and every light shining before men but the brightest;—and then set over against him the weakest and most ignorant servant of God, laden if you will with infirmities of temper, and kept back by disadvantages of position, but possessing that most precious of all treasures, “MY GOD,”—a reconciled Father in Christ,—a refuge in every storm,—a light in

every dark passage of life, a friend in every difficulty, an upholder in sickness, a disarmer of death, and an everlasting portion in eternity ; —and ask yourselves, if there be need to put the question, which situation of the two is the better—better by the universal confession of all judges in the matter? Can there be a moment's doubt? Should we not all, choosing deliberately and with our eyes open, say, “ Give me the cross with the crown, rather than a life of ease and honour with neither ; let me be God's servant for eternity, even if I lose the pleasure of time ; give me the knowledge of God as mine, however dearly bought, rather than the apparent bliss of ignorance of Him?” Such, I doubt not, would be our deliberate choice. But the mischief is, we *do not* choose deliberately ; we are too often carried out of our right judgment by interest, or by prejudice, or by indolence,—and though life and death are set before us, we are in danger of choosing death. And therefore God very frequently makes the choice for us ; and when He has gracious purposes towards men, He wounds and afflicts them, He casts them down from high trust and power and wealth, He takes from them the desire of their eyes with a stroke, and all that they may know that He is the Lord. Such, doubtless, was the use of His severe dispensation towards His own chosen tribe of Judah. Some traces of it we can see in history. We often hear of idolatry among

them before the Babylonish captivity; but after it, never. The holiest man among the whole records of the prophets, Daniel, who when yet a youth was numbered with Noah, who was perfect in his generations,—and with Job, of whom God Himself testified that there was none like him in all the earth a perfect and an upright man,—this young man was a saint of the captivity, glorifying God in the midst of the great Babylon. And imagination, guided by history, may yet further trace the effects of this great lesson on God's people. Far and wide over the Eastern cities we may see them scattered, into most if not into all, carrying the worship and knowledge of Jehovah, and their moral purity and their sense of a responsibility to One above, which marked them as singular among the nations. In many a town of Asia, and of Greece, and of Italy, and of Africa, did the synagogue, or the place of prayer by the river side, testify that they knew Jehovah was the Lord, and keep a light burning which did much to lighten the Gentiles, and prepare them to walk in the beams of the Sun of Righteousness Himself. And who can tell how many individual souls among that captive band, thus sadly driven away to Babylon, were brought to the knowledge of the Lord for themselves? The weary prisoner who dropped on the sands of the desert, if he died grasping with the hand of faith his covenant God, returning to Him from whom

he had deeply erred,—O was it not worth the change—from his vine and fig-tree, and the wife of his soul, and his prattling babes on the pleasant slope of his native Zion, even to that burning bed of solitary anguish—was it not worth this, or any change, if he had found his God,—Him of whom he could say, “My flesh and my heart faileth—but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever?”

And you, my brethren, whom I now address,—who knows what discipline God may have in store for us, to teach us the same precious lesson,—to put into our possession the same invaluable treasure,—to prepare us for the same everlasting portion? We never know, how near sorrow and privation and severe trial may be to any of us—and less than ever can we tell this at a period like the present, of public anxiety,—when many a family, and many an individual has heard, and many another is waiting to receive, the intelligence of God’s acts, and to bow to His sovereign will. O dear friends, if any who now hear me have tasted, or be yet appointed to taste, the cup of bitter anguish, yea if any have it presented by their Father to drink to the dregs, think, when sorrow gives you time to think, of His dealings towards His own people, and the purpose of those dealings—and be assured that He has the same purpose towards you;—that He afflicts you, that you may know that He is the Lord—that to your

own soul may be brought home in living reality the possession of a reconciled Father in Christ, the testimony of that Spirit, who enables us to cry "Abba, Father," and bears witness with our spirits, that we are the children of God; who assures you that neither tribulation nor bereavement nor any other trial, can separate you from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

But why am I putting hypothetical cases for a few, when I might be speaking to all? What is God doing with us as a nation? Are we not passing through a crisis in our national history? Do not unexampled judgments, mingled with unexampled mercies, plainly proclaim to us His presence? Can we suppose it without purpose, that He led us into this great war so unexpectedly, at a time when every heart was beating calmly, and all thought the peace of the world secure? that He commanded the pestilence to strike at the same time, so severely but so mercifully? that He filled our fields with grain and stayed the clouds till our garner were crowded—that He led our armies to victory, but tempered that victory with anxiety and mourning? Dear friends, it cannot be: even the sparrow falleth not to the ground without His knowledge and appointment: the life of the ignorant savage who rushes with his horde to satiate blind revenge, is in His hand: and can we suppose that we who have His book, and live in the truth of His Gospel, and are set

for the light of the nations, are not dealt with thus for some high and blessed purpose, to be wrought on ourselves and others? Do we not hear Him saying to us in all this, "Ye shall know that I am the Lord?" Truly He seems in these latter days to be vindicating His presence and agency, in a way our fathers knew not. We tilled our fields with the pride of science, and talked of the earth as our servant; and He smote the fruit of the earth with mysterious and incurable disease. We spoke of putting our congregated multitudes above pestilential influence, and of eradicating this and the other from the list of human maladies; and He sent among us a swift and terrible pestilence, which baffled all our foresight as to the places of its visitation, and turned the wisdom of the wise into folly in searching for a remedy. We deemed that the diplomacy of veteran warriors who knew the perils of the nations, had ensured us a millennial peace;—and behold war desolates our households. Is all this any other than the Lord? Is it not His unmistakeable voice, saying to us and to every one among us, "Be still, and know that I am God?"

Be assured of this, brethren, ALL SHALL KNOW IT one day. "As I live," saith the Lord, "every tongue shall confess to me, every knee shall bow²." The hardy unbeliever, who now thrusts the thought of God out of his heart as

² Rom. xiv. 11.

unworthy of his intellectual or moral pride, or of his position in the world,—the careless ungodly man, who half believes, and half hopes his faith is not true,—these, and all other kinds and shades of men without God, shall one day acknowledge Him, and see His hand in all these things. “He shall be revealed in flaming fire with His holy angels, taking vengeance on those who know Him not³,”—and they shall know too late that He is the Lord. But, dear friends, will any of you wait for that awful day, when the door of mercy will be shut, and the blood of sprinkling dried, and the fountain of living water sealed to you? God forbid that you should, with so many gracious warnings around you, so many tokens of His merciful care, so many calls to repentance. O blessed, for ever blessed, who heed His warnings, who discern His tokens, who hear His fatherly invitations—who at this great and unprecedented period in the history of our nation, and our own history, forsake the empty formality of a mere usual or fashionable religion, and the cold decencies of those who live by public opinion only, and take the Lord for their God, their Saviour for their pattern and Master, the Holy Spirit for their teacher and Guide: who begin from this time, sensible of what God is doing for them, a life of real genuine self-devotion to Him: honouring Him with their sub-

³ 2 Thess. i. 7, 8.

stance, and by their exertions for the temporal and spiritual good of those around them; ruling their families in His faith and fear, and educating their children for His glory and a happy eternity. May there be many such among us—may this people, now passing through such solemn events, come forth from them with rich increase of those that know the Lord, and more fitted for what further work He may have to do with us in these latter days of our world.

“Ye shall know that I am JEHOVAH.” We may look on it finally as God’s PROMISE TO HIS PEOPLE. And it is a crowning promise—one that includes all others in itself. For the more knowledge there is of God, not mere head knowledge, nor tongue knowledge, but heart knowledge and life knowledge, the more love will there be towards Him; and the more love there is towards Him, the more enjoyment there will be of Him; so that they who know Him best, shall stand highest in the ranks of the blessed. And to know that He is the Lord JEHOVAH, is to know Him in His covenant relations to us,—as the FATHER, willing and ordaining the mystery of our redemption,—as the SON, perfecting our nature and purging us from sin by His blood,—as the SPIRIT, dwelling in us and sanctifying us. It is, to know Him to be ours, and ourselves to be His; to feel, amidst His mysterious dispensations, perfect security and peace in Him; to rejoice in Him,

though He afflict and bereave us ; to press onward to the day whose light shall make the brightest earthly revelation of Him seem as darkness, and the highest earthly knowledge of Him as ignorance itself.

Then we shall know even as we are known by Him ; we shall know Him to be the Lord, the covenant Jehovah, not by catching fitful gleams of His mercy and wisdom, which are all we can here discern, but by gazing on the full unclouded brilliance of His perfections, with the keenness of angel vision, unsatiated through the days of eternity.

SERMON X.

NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

1854.

MATT. vi. 10.

“Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.”

AT a time when so many are called upon to exercise resignation to the supreme disposal of God, it may not be amiss to endeavour to sketch out the nature and motives of that Christian grace, both on its active and on its passive side, and to distinguish it from some of its counterfeits.

THY WILL BE DONE. Such is one of the petitions put up by the great family to its heavenly Father. Such is the token of a frame of mind in which all children of God should be at all times. Were we beings without infirmity and sin, perfectly attuned to our Father's will, these words would represent our entire sphere of volition and action. We should be ever striving upwards and onwards, in the

direction of Him, whose pleasure would be the measure of ours. And such is at this moment the blessed estate of the holy angels. Our Lord in this very petition has, as He occasionally did in His discourses, drawn aside a little the veil which separates earth from heaven, and given us a glimpse of the employments of those who encircle the throne of God. Thy will be done in earth, AS IT IS DONE IN HEAVEN. At these wonderful words, the world of happy spirits opens before us: we see them full of life, full of joy, unwearying in energy, unfailing in strength,—none clashing with another, none envying another; all devoting themselves, without by-purpose or reserve, to the single work of doing their Father's will. We may well imagine that the least of these is holier, mightier, more fruitful in good works, than the greatest saint whom the Church below has seen. And if from the least we follow upwards in the ranks of the heavenly host, our powers fail to conceive the glorious office filled by those who hold high place and dignity there (for such Scripture informs us there are); what triumphs of love they achieve, what high behests of God they are ever executing to His glory.

It may be well that we should dwell somewhat more at length on the pattern here presented to us by Christ, because it will teach us a little respecting that effort, which we are to make to come up to it.

AS IT IS IN HEAVEN. The nature and manner of heavenly employments are not precisely known to us: whether they consist mainly in works moral or physical, or are compounded of both, which from the few hints given in Scripture, seems more probable. But of some of the *qualities* of that perfect doing of God's will, we can treat, from what we know of ourselves; who, a little lower than the angels, are, like them, beings with reason and affections, and spiritual life before God. And we may observe first, that their doing of God's will is WITHOUT SELFISHNESS. No idol set up within interferes with the proper aim and end of action. The side-question is not ever recurring, 'What shall I gain by this duty?' 'How shall I be thought of, if I obey this or that divine command?' This it is, above all things, which makes their service so perfect: there is no dark blot on their brightest day, no evil weed of selfishness twining round their love and charity, no self-congratulation in their humility; but all is simple and entire; their hearts are knit, their energies given without let or hindrance to doing God's will.

Again their conformity to His will is all REAL AND GENUINE; the act first of the heart and affections and desires, then of the tongue and outward bearing. They are not encumbered by a mass of hackneyed phrases, which serve instead of real resignation. They are in no

danger of putting the knowledge of God's will in the place of the practice of it; nor of uttering all that is submissive in their prayers, while their lips and their lives are rebellious and murmuring. O no; their abundance is in the heart; there God dwells, there His will is supreme; and when they sing the new song before His throne, and devote themselves to Him, it is done with all the fulness of desire, and affection, and reverence, which can penetrate an angel's being.

Again, their work is done *without intermission or weariness*. They cease not day nor night. Not subject to waste or decay, they need no repose to renew their energies; no feebleness of old age comes upon their unfinished plans, nor does the mind wander in search of new pasture, while the old is unexhausted; whatever their hand findeth to do, they do it with their might.

Already, you will observe, the comparison of heaven with earth begins to fail. We cannot imitate their unwearied energy; the very condition of our being is infirmity and decay. But it fails in a more remarkable point still; more remarkable, because here we have the advantage. In opening my sermon, I referred to the active and passive sides of resignation. There are two senses in which a created being may say to God "Thy will be done." One, "Thy will be done *by* me;" and the other, "Thy will be done *in* me." Now the holy

angels are mainly concerned in the active performance of their heavenly Father's will. It is done in an eminent and perfect manner *by* them. That it is also done *in* them, is manifest, for they are all without sin, moving in their several high spheres according to His everlasting purpose and good pleasure. In their case however, this latter portion of the duty is performed by the very conditions of their being. The *necessity* of resignation to the divine will, in the ordinary sense of the term, could never be enforced on an angel's attention. With him, the course of God's pleasure respecting him is the course of his own pleasure and highest desire, in every case without exception. There is for him no disappointment, no bereavement, no lesson to be learned, that his present state is not his rest, no usurper to be cast down in his heart that the Lord his God may reign supreme. And therefore the *suffering* God's will, the lying passive in his Father's hand, is to him a matter of course, a thing concerning which doubt or mistrust never entered his mind. And while in this respect also the angels are our pattern, that we should strive to resign ourselves into God's hand as undoubtingly, as trustfully,—yet it will be obvious to you that here we stand, by the very disadvantage of our position, on higher and nobler ground even than the angels themselves; in this respect a larger field of Christian duty, an ampler scope

for glorifying God and imitating Christ, lies among the thorny ways of disappointment and bereavement, and sickness and sorrow, than amidst the fulness of joy in God's presence, and the pleasures for evermore at His right hand. Here then we have an instance where, if they stand our perfect pattern, we are the admiration of the angels themselves. In the absence among them of struggle and conflict, they watch with keen interest our struggles and conflicts; in the midst of their never-fading blooms, they sympathize with the crushed and withered flowers of this earth; wandering as they do by the clear rivers whose streams make glad the city of God, they follow with anxious eyes the turbid stream of man's life, watching to see it clear and brighten; and the only joy in heaven which our blessed Lord has described to us, is the joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

Here then, beloved, we are higher than the angels. Yea, and by still another token yet. We are born to trouble as the sparks fly upward. But did this, our infirmity, our defect, avert the All-seeing eye from us, or cause us to be outcasts in God's universe? No, brethren; the eternal Son of God, the Lord of the angels, saw our lost condition and loved us; He made Himself lower than them; He became, not an angel, but one of the sons of men, and this of set purpose that He might suffer and die. He

has drained to the dregs the bitter cup of human suffering; and now when the angels and man are compared, we, a race subject to decay and death, a tribe of whom truly suffering is the badge, stand not alone, but He, our elder brother, our righteous and glorious Head, made perfect by and through suffering, leads our ranks; and by His sufferings, and by ours in and for Him, shall one day be made known to the principalities and powers in heavenly places, the love and the wisdom of God. Here then, beloved, is our glory. Here is the point in which man excels his angel patterns. It is theirs, to *do* the will of our common Father in a degree to which we must aspire but here on earth can never attain; it is ours, to *suffer* His will—a method of glorifying Him in which, from the very conditions of their being, they in heaven can never share. So that while we bear part in their work and shall one day equal them in it, they can bear no part in ours. And in the great birthday of the new heaven and the earth, when a second time the morning stars shall sing together, and all the angels of God shout for joy, they who shall stand before the thrones clad in white robes and with palm in their hands, are the great multitude whom no man can number, who have *come out of great tribulation*.

Man's glory then is, to suffer. In this sense let us consider the words, **THY WILL BE**

DONE. Let us regard them as expressing the intelligent resignation, on the part of an imperfect and erring being, of his ways and his prospects into the hand of an almighty and merciful Father. And thus viewed, they imply first, a *knowledge of the relation between God and himself*. The Christian is no mere fatalist, the servant of a blind destiny bearing along all things with a current which none can withstand. God is to him a Father, watching over him, careful and solicitous for his welfare. His fatherly love has been proved in a thousand ways. In all the provisions for his nourishment and comfort, of which the world is full, in all the far richer promise which is contained in Christ for his better life, he sees written the truth that God is good, and does good to him. And he knows the history of God's past dealings. Hitherto He has done well for His people: He has not forsaken them that trust in Him. The most adverse circumstances have in the end proved to be for their good: God has led them by a way that they knew not. All this dwells on his mind, and from such evidence as this, strengthened by his own spiritual experience that the Lord is gracious, he learns to trust Him, and to say respecting himself, "THY WILL BE DONE." Such may be the daily feeling of perhaps most of us under ordinary circumstances; we are willing to trust ourselves in the hand of God; the disposal of those matters

over which we have no control, we can leave to Him, in confidence that He will order them aright.

Such I suppose is our common meaning, when we say every day "Thy will be done" in our Lord's prayer. We mean, "Here I am, dispose of me as thou wilt." And doubtless such a general feeling is a good and salutary one, an excellent introduction to our daily duties and trials. It may be well, however, to put it sometimes more to the test, and question it somewhat more closely than Christians usually do. Have we reflected, when we thus say, that our heavenly Father's will evidently is, that we should become perfect, as our Saviour did, through *sufferings*? Have we made our account, that health and strength, fortune and friends, are all in His hand, suspended in the balance with our eternal welfare? that our Father's care over us is such, that if one of them is seen by Him to outweigh and interfere with our soul's health, He will surely interpose and take it from us? Have we borne in mind, that the very day, in whose opening hour we kneel in our closets and say "Thy will be done," may see our whole life's bitterest and dreariest passage,—may behold us stricken down by our Father's judgment, may make the strong man a miserable wreck, the rich man a poor bankrupt, the social man a solitary in the world's wilderness? Do those whose souls are knit in

one by love's closest tie of God's own sanctioning, reflect, when they say these words together in the morning, that one may be taken before the evening, and the other left, to try how deep the resignation to God's will really was? Does it ever cross the mother's mind, as she teaches the blessed prayer to her babe, fresh risen and bright in the morning, that ere night His will may indeed be done upon both—that she may be striving to suffer it on earth, while her darling is doing it in heaven? Far be it from me to dash or embitter the heart's joys, pure and holy like these. But O brethren, such thoughts as these will not dash nor embitter joy. Then it is embittered, when the soul has made her nest and her home here below, has gazed on her beloved object insatiably, and never thought of God—has used the world as if she possessed it—and some hour when all is fair and serene, in the midst of much treasure laid up for many years, comes the fatal stroke, unlooked for, unaccountable, irremediable. One such record I have seen engraved on the tomb of a beloved child: “The miserable parents ventured their all on this frail bark, and the wreck was total.” This is bitterness indeed—but to see all our comforts coming day by day from God's hand—to live in the continual consciousness that He who to-day tries our gratitude by giving them, may to-morrow try our faith by withdrawing them,—this is not to poison

joy, but to enhance it tenfold—it is not to blight the fair plant, but to give it strength and endurance, so that it shall flourish not only in the sunshine but in the storm; not only in the morn and promise of life, but amidst disappointment and decay and death.

“Thy will be done.” And what if that will be not only afflictive, but dark and mysterious also? What if God be pleased to wound just where we believed we wanted cherishing? What if to the weak and shortsighted eye of sense He even seem as a tyrant, delighting in doing us harm, striking us when we are down, yea forgetting His own promises and breaking His everlasting covenant? O brethren, I know how hard it is in such cases to feel from the heart this prayer—how the words seem almost to choke us in utterance, and the petition to be more than we ever can really attain to. But let us not, for all that, relinquish our trust in our Father’s love and care of us. What He does, we know not now; but we shall know hereafter. I remember, on one of those glorious days of all but cloudless sunshine, with which this year’s summer has abounded, passing in view of a well-known line of bare and majestic downs, then basking in the full beams of noon. But on one face of the hill rested a mass of deep and gloomy shadow. On searching for its cause, I at length discovered one little speck of cloud, bright as light, floating in the clear blue above;

this it was, which cast on the hill side that ample track of gloom. And what I saw was an image of Christian sorrow. Dark and cheerless often as it is, and unaccountable as it passes over our earthly path, in heaven its token shall be found; and it shall be known to have been but as a shadow of His brightness, whose name is Love. In this case too, then, His will be done; rest in the Lord, and He shall make it plain. It is good to wait; it lifts men above the world and out of themselves, and they grow in the knowledge of their Father and God, and in ripeness for the day when He shall be revealed.

But while we thus leave ourselves in His loving hand, let us not forget, in concluding, that with which we begun, and to which the pattern proposed to us seems more directly to point,—the active side of our petition. Thy will be done—*in* us, as it is in heaven, though here it be by suffering and trial: and *by* us, as thine angels do it there. That is, as we have seen, unselfishly,—heartily,—zealously. Reflect, dear friends, to what this pledges us, when we utter the Lord's prayer. Are any of us trying to mix in self with our religion,—going through the world indeed decently and in a godly manner, but seldom or never practising self-denial for God's sake or God's work? Are any of us overlooking the vast opportunities for good which God has sown thick among us,

and spending our means on our comforts and luxuries—doing our own will, and not His? O then, is it not worse than mockery, for us to use this His prayer? Will not the words “Thy will be done” rise up in judgment against the man who uttered them day by day, and yet in every day’s acts preferred his own will? Can he who aimed so little at the heavenly pattern ever share in heavenly employment? Are any of us, again, doing the Lord’s will with a double heart,—deceitfully,—offering Him only a religious profession, and careless of a holy life? Deeply indeed is such a question needed in these our days. We have had so many religious movements, and divisions on points of doctrine, that some seem almost to dissociate belief from practice,—nay even regard carefulness and earnestness in good works as a token of unsoundness in doctrine. It is the tendency of all periods of more than ordinary religious earnestness, to degenerate into, and be succeeded by, periods of empty formalism, bearing the same outward characteristics and distinguishing marks. Take heed,—I may be speaking to persons belonging to both sections of opinion,—that either of the two great movements of our day do not in any case among us, thus issue: that the zealous assertion of pure evangelical doctrine which brightened the beginning of our century, become not merely a tenacity of words, and party phrases, and party exclusiveness, or

even of pure doctrine itself: and that the more recent revival of attention to the external parts of religion, to which, with all the sad consequences of its abuse, every fair-dealing man must confess some obligation, do not, by the attraction of ceremonial and fair seeming, draw away the heart from that Gospel which comes not to us through priests nor churches nor sacraments, but is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.—Am I, finally, speaking to any who are doing the will of God indolently? who not for want of heart, but for want of energy, are leaving undone the things which they ought to be doing? O my friends, is this a time for folding the hands in idleness, when God's will is waiting to be done all around you? when across the wide seas is wafted the cry of human misery, from the reeking battle-plain, or the crowded hospital—when from many a widowed hearth at home goes up, I will not say the prayer, but the claim, for help at your hands? Can you see the noble-minded and self-denying giving their substance and giving themselves to the holy work of doing God's will at our present crisis,—from the Queen on her throne to the workman at his daily labour,—can you see this and be doing nothing? O I trust not. Though we are all feeble and soon wearied, may our little strength at least be spent in doing His will, and aiming

at the activity of those who never rest in its fulfilment.

One word more, to guard against misapprehension. In speaking to-day of the pattern set before us in our text, I have limited myself purposely to *its* limits. I have said but little of that other glorious pattern, which He set us, who gave us this prayer. On that, much more might be said, and a wider subject be opened. I have not, far be it from me, overlooked that First Example ; but it was not before us to-day.

May we ever be found, beloved friends, walking in the spirit of these precious words, “**THY WILL BE DONE ;**” prompt to act, patient to suffer, as He pleases ; that after we have for a while been tried here below by suffering, we may be found above in His perfect likeness, and do His will, as they do it there.

SERMON XI.

TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

1854.

MATT. vi. 9.

“Hallowed be Thy Name.”

LAST Sunday, I was induced by the fact of so many being at present brought to bow under the afflicting hand of God, to dwell on that sentence of our Lord's prayer, “Thy will be done.” That was a petition easy to understand, but hard to feel. To-day let us meditate on another in the same prayer, which does not perhaps convey such definite ideas to our minds, “Hallowed be Thy name.”

And first let us notice its *character*, which is the same indeed with that of all three opening petitions of the prayer. It might seem a strange thing, when needy and sinful creatures are taught to pray to their Father who is in heaven, that coming as they do laden with guilt and misery, and abounding with wants to be sup-

plied, the heart should be directed first to yearn, not after the removal of guilt, nor the supply of need, but after God's honour, God's glory, God's will, God's kingdom. Surely, judging by the pattern our Lord has set us, we have somewhat transposed the proper order of things in this matter of prayer. For the usual practice of even religious persons differs very widely from this arrangement. Ask the generality of them respecting private prayer, and you will be told that it is the pouring out of the burdens of the individual soul before God—the wrestling with Him for mercies and blessings. And the less enlightened and more enthusiastic of religionists carry this feeling yet further; and you hear of whole hours spent in beseeching the Lord for personal spiritual mercies: long nights passed in pleading for the forgiveness of sins, for a present sense of an interest in Christ—you hear men exhorted thus to strive with God, till they obtain from Him joy and peace in believing. But surely if the Lord's prayer is right, all this cannot be right also. We are far too selfish, depend on it, in our religion now-a-days; and the strenuous assertion of the great doctrines of the Gospel at the Reformation, and again in the evangelical revival of the beginning of this century, amidst all the blessings which we owe to both, have brought perhaps this snare with them, that they have fixed too exclusive conscious attention on men's own individual

spiritual interests, and withdrawn them from that expansion over mankind, and exaltation into God, which is the true spirit of those who are the sons of God by faith in Christ. And it seems to me, that one of the duties of Christ's ministers in this age is, avoiding all party names and party spirit, to strive to draw upward and expand outward that spiritual life, which lately perhaps has been too much working inward. To contemplate self in some shape, will always be the natural religion of man: and in this direction is the tendency towards corruption of his spiritual religion also. Self as an object of admiration and reliance in one case: self as an object of intense anxiety, or even of abomination and loathing, in the other; wherever man's natural heart follows its bent, self will be the centre, whether dark or bright, and all other things the circumference. But the religion of Christ Jesus has for its first and main object, in dealing with man, to depose self, and restore God to His lawful place on the throne and in the centre of the heart. This it does, I said, from the very first; and therefore in this simple and sublime prayer, which we are all to use, and after the pattern and analogy of which our other prayers are to be constructed, there is not a word of self in the three first petitions. But is this, because our Lord wishes to run counter to our nature—to quench, when we kneel down in prayer, the desires of our hearts

and thwart the course of our feelings? Is it because He would cast down of selves from our first regard, and set up another person there? No indeed; this could not be: nor have these petitions any such object. Christ came not to quench our nature, but to ennoble it; not to annihilate the dark places, but to shine in them. The object is, to draw our natural desires upward to their proper aim: to enthrone in our hearts not the poor limited individual, whose isolated well-being is no worthy object for us,—but Him who is our Father in heaven; in whom every blessing for our race is summed up, who is the Fountain of love and peace and joy,—whom to know truly is eternal life. And this enthroning of Him in the heart may not and cannot be done by merely clinging individually to Him—not by such petitions as this, “Reveal Thyself to *me*, grant *me* to know Thee, to love Thee, to serve Thee:” no; though the faith of Christ, the love and fear and knowledge of God, must be an individual matter,—the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth,—yet is the individual man to lift himself above himself, to come to God not merely for himself, but as one of the children of the great Father, praying for the whole family together. Thus God, the centre and Head of humanity, is to be sought by us for all our kind; love of mere self is to be superseded by and absorbed in love of all; a feeling just as natural,—

as has been abundantly and decisively proved,—but belonging to that nobler and better unfolding of our nature, which the lower selfish man knows not.

Thus the spirit of these petitions is to us a solemn lesson for our prayers and for our whole religious life ; that while we are careful not to put in the place of God those more palpable hindrances to His glory which History holds us up as warnings, we do not exalt one idol in His place infinitely more pernicious than them all, because ever present and ever worshipped within us.

So far is the negative side of the spirit of these words ; the positive one has been lightly touched on, but will bear more treating. God then is the proper subject of our first desires in prayer ; God in all, and in ourselves as parts of all ; if He is served by men, we, who take our stamp and our habits from the age in which He places us, shall serve Him better also ; if His will is done here as in heaven, we who are here, shall bear our part in doing that will ; if the knowledge of the glory of the Lord cover the earth as the waters cover the sea, we who dwell on the earth, shall know Him from the least even to the greatest. And so we pray first for these wider blessings ; these which will bring others in their train, and the very desiring of which draws our thoughts to their right aim and object, and divests us of all mere selfish

regards. And among them stands foremost this petition, "HALLOWED BE THY NAME." "Let thy name be accounted holy."

What is THY NAME? Clearly, not the mere word by which we designate Our Father in heaven,—so that the petition should only mean "Keep us from vilifying, or talking in vain, that word with our lips." Of course this is one of its meanings; but not the primary, much less the satisfying import. The "name of the Lord" is very much more than this. Is the meaning again "Hallowed be THOU THYSELF"—praised by thine angels and thy human children, accounted and known as the God of holiness and purity all over the world? This again is implied and doubtless lies nearer the sense; but then why "hallowed be THY NAME," and not "hallowed be THOU?"

The NAME of God in Scripture signifies, that revelation of Himself which He has made to His creatures; that preached and written and recorded character of God, which at the age in which men live, He has been pleased to manifest to our race. And it will be obvious to you, that such meaning of the word will vary in the amount and character of what it implies, according to the period at which we exemplify it. To the Jew, the Name of God was the exhibition of the covenant Jehovah, who made the promise to Abraham, unto which promise, in St. Paul's words, "the twelve tribes, instantly

serving God day and night, hoped to attain¹." To *us*, the Name of God is his revelation of Himself as our reconciled Father in Jesus Christ, in which He has entered into a new covenant with us, whose charter is "God so loved the world that He hath given His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son²." So then it is not for any man to say, "We make this prayer to the great Father of all in heaven, and in making it I will have none of your special religious tenets, but I will offer it in the wide sense in which any human creature might understand it." Such an one forgets, that he did not find out his Father in heaven, nor did he invent this prayer, nor did any man on this earth; but He who gave us the prayer has given us much more also, and the Name of God, of which He here speaks, is inseparably bound up with Himself, His own words and deeds, His Death and Resurrection and present Mediation in heaven; and no man can or may dissociate these things which God has joined together, by the very gift of the prayer to us.

Thus when we say "Hallowed be Thy Name," we mean, "May that revelation of Thyself which Thou hast made in Thy Son Jesus Christ be

¹ Acts xxvi. 7.

² John iii. 16. 1 John v. 11.

hallowed." And how HALLOWED? Not "made holy;" this it needs not. It is itself the noblest example which the world has seen, of that union of exalted love, exalted purity, and exalted justice, which we designate by the term holiness. And a moment or two respecting this word. It is a very remarkable word. While many terms have a religious and a secular meaning, a sacred and profane reference, this word has but one meaning, but one reference. It is only used of religious persons and matters. We ought to be thankful for such a word. We have very few such. It saves misunderstanding and trouble. The very utterance of it recalls the mind to sacred subjects; the thing implied by it is found only in God, and those who are like God. You may say of an ungodly worldly man, that he is upright, blameless in conduct, pure in life, just in his dealings, benevolent, kind, merciful; but you can never say he is holy. Those only are or even pretend to be holy, who are or affect to be religious. And the very idea of what is meant by the word cannot be properly taken in, but by those who are religious men. The fragmentary portions of the character which I have just sketched out, are known in the world; but the whole character, compounded of these, is entirely unknown and unappreciated. And no wonder that it is so; because they cannot see the bond that unites all these graces which make up holiness, viz. God on the throne of

the heart; His love and fear penetrating the whole man, in his uprightness, his blamelessness, his purity, his justice, his benevolence, his kindness, his acts of mercy. So that when we say "Let thy Name be held holy," we mean, "let thy revelation of Thyself, as a reconciled Father in Christ, be known and appreciated by men as belonging to and penetrating their characters and hopes, in a way in which the ungodly world can never know nor appreciate it; let all men be put in possession of its secret, and make it to themselves the highest reality of their being." And O beloved, what a petition is this! That all men may know God as their Father in Christ, as their Justifier by faith in Him,—as the Source to them of that purity and love and justice which may make them likewise holy, by the Holy Spirit the Sanctifier. It is indeed a missionary prayer, in the widest sense; for to this end all the labours of the Church and ministry tend, and when this is so, then will Christ's kingdom have come, and God's will be done, in the very highest and most blessed degree.

But he who prays for all, includes also himself; and as I before said, our Lord teaches us thus to pray that we may, not abolish self-love but put it in its proper place; that we may serve Him not as solitary beings, alone in the world with their Maker, as some men's saying is, but as humble children of His

great family. And in this sense, when we say, "Hallowed be Thy name," we say, "let it be hallowed in us and by us, in our daily lives, by thoughts, by words, by deeds."

To this then let us devote our remaining time, to considering when and how God's name should be hallowed in and by us.

First for our thoughts, the inward fountains of our words and acts. That revelation of God in Christ, after which we are called Christians, into which we have been baptized, by which we profess to live, and in the consolation of which we hope to die,—what estimation does it hold, brethren, in each one of our minds, in private, when we deal frankly with ourselves, and none is by to please or to offend? O this is a most important question for us all. Is it a mere thing to reverence, because we have been taught to reverence it? A thing beset with difficulties which we dare not think of,—and thus do we in fact very seldom think of it at all in our inner hearts? Is it again a system which we feel ourselves pledged to uphold and defend, like an hereditary political creed? Have we suffered ourselves to take it up with all the eager spirit of partisans, and with all a partisan's blindness, without conscientious search or intelligent persuasion? Surely neither of these can be any fulfilment of the petition "Hallowed be Thy name." For the holiness of God's revelation in Christ to be proved in us, it must be appre-

hended with the powers of the mind, the fervour of the affections, the zeal of personal interest : there must be that abundant pouring out of the warm and earnest heart into all its channels of love and justice and purity, that the inner man shall be, in the most private and unwitnessed moments, full of yearning desire to cast in the whole being into that course of divine mercy, in which all God's dealings in Christ are ever flowing onward : to spend and be spent in love to Him who hath so loved us. Thus is God's name hallowed in the inner thought : by having Him as an ever-present loving Father, and humbly trusting in our acceptance in the beloved, and walking under the teaching and prompting of the blessed Spirit in our retirements. So that when we say this, "Hallowed be thy name," may we follow it up by a diligent search into God's word to find Him, and an honest conscientious endeavour to make our faith the reality of our closets, not merely our profession in public.

But this latter too is of some consequence in the business. Next in importance to believing in the heart, is confessing with the mouth. And of this, the reverencing His name and the things belonging to it in common conversation, as it is in these our days the easiest part, so it must not for a moment be imagined to discharge our obligation. Many a man would not on any account take God's name in vain in conversation,

who yet does not scruple to assert principles directly opposite to God's revealed will. And this is by far the deeper and more mischievous dishonour of Him. The profane swearer is a beacon which all may avoid ; and we have by the indirect influence of Christ's gospel, at length arrived at days when, thank God, such an one is excluded from all decent society. So that the mischief done by him is as nothing compared to that wrought by the man of more reverent and bridled tongue, who yet is an upholder of Christian maxims and ungodly principles. Take but one example out of many : God says to us all, " Love them that despitefully use you : return good for evil." Now if a man respected in the world upholds a maxim contrary to this, maintaining in society that insults must be avenged—accounting it pusillanimous to pass over and forgive injuries, and manly to resent them,—can such an one, whatever excuse he frame for himself, be for a moment said to be hallowing God's name in his words ? Is he not manifesting plain disrespect to God's revelation of His own will by Christ ? And to pass to deeds, which very generally answer to men's daily words and converse, O how careful should we be to hallow by our lives' fruits the great Name by which we are called ! Where is the profit of our knowing God and professing to love Him, if our lives be found barren of fruit to His glory ? And such fruit should and will be found, if found at

all, not in great and rare efforts only,—not merely when generous sacrifice is demanded, or arduous duty is to be undertaken: but in the lesser and usual acts of every day and hour, in taking up and bearing every day's cross after Christ, however irksome or heavy that cross may be. Are we thus hallowing His name? O to how many a family, to how many a Christian must I now be speaking, who might be bringing forth, more abundantly than at present, the fruits of righteousness to God's praise! How many lives are slipping away full of golden opportunities unthought of, spent for the world or for trifles—warm affections lost—young hearts beating and yearning in vain—eagerness and energy misplaced—precious fertilizing streams running to waste! In how many cases now before me are those sacred words “Hallowed be Thy name” followed by no effort in thought, word, or deed, that that name should really be hallowed!

One word more, on a matter, in these days, ever present to our minds. It has pleased God, in His mysterious providence, to involve us in what we firmly believe to be a just and righteous war, nay a war on whose issue, under Him, depend in large measure, not only the rights and liberties of mankind, but also the spread of the Gospel itself. We entered this war trusting in Him, and with national supplications for His help. We are now just

beginning keenly to feel that such supplications were not a mere decent ceremonial, but a deep necessity: we begin to see that His arm is chastening us. O then let us take heed that in our conduct of the war, abroad and at home, we hallow His great name! Let it be seen—and I trust, in more instances than a few, it has been already seen—that God is among us of a truth—that we are a God-fearing people. May we at the present juncture, when a call is made on us to send out chaplains to our sick and wounded soldiers, have our hearts influenced to follow up our daily petition, “Hallowed be Thy name,” by making every bedside in those crowded hospitals a place where prayer is wont to be made, and lighting in those eastern lands, yea, amidst all the ravages and tempests of war, a candle which by God’s grace shall never be put out.

SERMON XII.

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

1854.

MATT. vi. 11.

“ Give us this day our daily bread.”

IF one of us were set to sum up, in a petition short as this, all our ordinary wants, I think we should be disposed to express them very differently. At least, if our prayers were to be the representation of our desires and anxieties, we certainly should. For what are we all toiling? For to-morrow, and for next year, and for our old age, and for our children when we are gone; for days which we know not whether we shall ever see, for summers whose sun may never cheer us, and winters whose frosts may whiten our graves. And if we, full of such plans, and reaching forward after such far distant schemes, were faithfully to condense them in one small petition, our utmost attainment of reliance on our Father might be “ Give us, our life through,

sufficient for us"—“Provide for us and ours while we are here”—“May to-morrow be as this day, and more abundant.”

But the great family of heaven and earth is taught a better and a nobler lesson. In its lower and unreasoning portion, God Himself has prescribed its course of simple dependence on Him. Beginning from unconscious matter, and proceeding upward, we find the same beautiful provision made throughout, for all to fill their places in peaceful order, His love and His power being sufficient for them. The sun fails not to give his light, nor the moon to reflect it in her monthly course: His simple and wonderful arrangement of our earth's position has sufficed to bring round the seasons of six thousand years, and the unvarying mornings and evenings of more than two millions of successive days. And all this time the tree has budded and blossomed, and borne its fruit, and decayed,—the flower of the field has spread its matchless blooms, the beasts of the earth and the fowl of the air, and the unnumbered tribes in the waters, have had each their organization and their vital power, and their sustenance, from His hand: He has fed the young ravens that call upon Him: the lions roaring after their prey have sought their meat from Him: and without Him, not a sparrow has fallen to the ground. Every where He openeth His hand, and filleth all things living with plenteousness. Wonder-

ful is the profusion of His gifts. Each plant brings forth not one seed, but myriads. The air, the ocean, the earth, are full of His lavish bounties. So amply, so gloriously, has He provided for His mute and unconscious, or His conscious but irresponsible children. And amidst them all He has placed one race, who alone of all creation can know Him and love Him; who alone can reach forward into eternity in their hopes and aspirings: who alone have in them that which solemnly admonishes them day by day, that for their thoughts, words, and deeds, they must give account to Him. And these He has placed in this His world, as in a school, to train the infancy of their being for its maturity in another. He has cast them down in the midst of these His works. They see the heavens His handy work, glorifying Him in their perfect order and repose. They see the birds which neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, yet are fed by Him. They walk amidst the flowers, which neither toil nor spin, yet are clad in colours which no kingly pomp can equal. And if, amidst such tokens of His providential care for the things beneath them, they can distrust Him, may it not well be said to them, "How much more shall He provide for you, O ye of little faith?"

It is the same spirit of quiet confidence in God's goodness and care, which our Lord proposes as our pattern, in dictating to us this

petition. But the spirit necessarily differs in the various orders of being. What is to the lower tribes an instinct implanted by their Creator, His will respecting them exemplified in their very constitution,—must be in us a conscious and humble act of faith in Him. What He accepts and rejoices in from them, He would not accept, nor could He be pleased with from us. They know of no future, whereas we dwell in the future. And to render that future, with all its cares and anxieties, into His fatherly Hand, is one of our bounden duties, as it is one of our highest privileges.

Thus then we come before Him, content to leave our welfare, for time and eternity, with Him, and say, “Give us this day our daily bread.” This day alone. Thus far may prayer look forward; to the wants of the present day, whose sun has risen upon us. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof; the care and toil which it brings, the distraction of mind from heaven, and binding down to earth those thoughts which should rise upward to God. And for this evil He provides us a remedy; to lay it before Him in prayer.

In this light then let us consider the petition, as a carrying the wants of the day to God’s throne of grace, and pleading for their supply. And in thus considering it, it will be plain to us all, that two senses of the words are admissible, and indeed necessary; a temporal, and a spiri-

tual sense, according as the daily bread is the sustenance of the body, or that of the immortal spirit.

And first for the lower and more obvious of these. "Give us to-day the daily bread of the body." Let us see what is here implied. Perhaps we are apt to forget that not only the supply of food, but the power to assimilate it is necessary to the body's sustenance; that bread is no bread to us, but a mere stone, if we have not the appetite and digestive power of health; and that thus, when we pray for our daily bread, we pray for that food which may be food to us, that our bodies may be sound and healthy to partake of it. And so the petition becomes one for our physical well-being in general; for food, and raiment, and shelter, and all that climate and circumstances render necessary to us; and it is admirably expounded in our Church catechism "I pray unto God that He will give us all things that be needful both for our souls and bodies." Thus simply, thus entirely, do we commend day by day our physical frames into our Father's hand. It was He, who at first fearfully and wonderfully made them; it is He who every moment holds the balance, on the nice adjustment of which depends the continuance of their animal vitality. All this goes on without our care; can He not, and will He not also keep them in His charge, in those further provisions from without, for which

our labour is by His appointment necessary? We may work on then from day to day, assured that the Lord will provide—asking humbly and receiving gratefully at His hand our daily bread.—But here an important consideration comes in. Is the body *for ever* to be fed? Are the animal powers for ever to be sustained? Do we not well know that He, who is leading us through this land to a better, has appointed for us trials in the body? that we must look for failing strength and decaying powers—for the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows shall be darkened? Or, on the other hand, may it not be, that the body in full vigour may in God's inscrutable providence be denied that sufficient supply of nourishment from without which is necessary to its wants? And this, not because He is weary of upholding, nor because His stores wax short; but that He may teach to those who pray for their daily bread, that it is not only this world's food, nor mere physical soundness, that can provide for their well-being, but something far higher and better than these—that man liveth not by bread only, but by every word that cometh out of the mouth of God doth man live. “Give us then our daily bread”—it may be the pleasant bread of daily sustenance in vigorous duty, or it may be the bitter bread of destitution or sickness—but

whatever Thou hast provided for our food, give it to us to-day—we leave ourselves in Thy hands—be it our meat and drink to do Thy will, as it was that of Thy Son whose Name we bear. Nor should another consideration be forgotten. It is the great family who are praying—not the individual for himself, but each for all:—“Give us this day our daily bread.” And are there any round thee, when thou utterest these words in thy closet, who are known to thee to be destitute of that bread this day, while thou hast and to spare? O how empty is thy prayer in this case—how full indeed of hypocrisy, but empty of real hearty desire! Thou prayest that all thy brothers and sisters may have this day their bread; it lies in thy power to forward thy prayer; go thou forth then from thine own well-furnished table, and see to it. Take but the few whom thou knowest; or ask thine own servants—or call in the watchmen from the streets—or go to the offices of the charitable societies—or seek the ministers of Christ, and they shall tell thee of tables unfurnished—of strong men pining for lack of food—of little children going to their daily school unfed, and lying down in their beds of tears with the scantiest crumb for sustenance,—while splendour and abundance is all around. Such wants we pledge ourselves to look into and relieve, when we say “Give us our daily bread.” And not only this, but it seems to

me that by these comprehensive words, we place ourselves on God's side for all acts of charity and mercy; in praying that all the cravings of the human family may be filled, we imply an earnest wish to do our part in filling them.

And now let me pass on to the second and higher import of the words of my text, "Give us this day our daily bread."

I said, the *higher* import; for who can doubt that the spiritual life is higher than the natural? The body of flesh and blood, with all its appetites, and all its powers, and all that satisfies and sustains them, shall pass away, but the spiritual life shall remain. The natural body, in its senses and capacities, is limited and feeble and slow; the spirit in its perceptions and aspirings is boundless, and swift, and marvellous in power. The natural life discontinues its effort with the fulfilment of its desires, and while that fulfilment lasts; and when it is over the want recurs; while the spiritual life rises into and becomes that which it feeds on, and new and higher desires spring from every fulfilment, and seek a loftier one still. "Whosoever drinketh of this water," said our Lord, "shall thirst again; but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but it shall be within him a well of water springing up unto everlasting life¹." And

¹ John iv. 13, 14.

this spiritual life wants likewise its daily bread. It cannot be sustained without it, any more than the other. And mind, when I am speaking thus, I no longer include all men in the consciousness of the want as before. I am speaking, I dare say, to many this morning, who may have thus far accompanied me with some degree of interest, but now find that interest droop, because they know not of any spiritual life to be fed, or spiritual wants to be supplied. Let me then say to you something about this life of which we are treating. It is one to which the ungodly world are strangers. It begins in the soul with earnest personal faith on the Lord Jesus Christ, accompanied by repentance for sins past and hearty turning of the desires and purposes to God. Its begetter and sustainer is the Holy Spirit of God, from union with whom, and His indwelling power, all spiritual life proceeds. Like natural life, it has its infancy, its youth, its maturity: but unlike natural life, it is not subject, unless violently extinguished by declension into ungodliness, to decay or death. And as it grows upwards, its daily bread is necessary for its maintenance. Its desires are boundless. It comes from Him who has said, "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled²." And upon what does it feed?

² Matt. v. 6.

For what do we pray, when we say in this sense, "Give us to-day our daily bread?" Do we mean, give us more holiness, more faith, more love? Men often make mistakes here. All these are either the means whereby the spiritual life takes sustenance, or the results of that sustenance when taken, but are none of them the sustenance itself. Faith is the hand stretched out for the bread of life; but we fall into the error of confounding the hand with that which it grasps; we do not feed on the hand, but on the food which it conveys to us. Love and holiness are the results of the healthful action of the spiritual life—but not that which, by supplying the vital powers, induces that healthful action. What then is that spiritual food, on which the soul must feed, or it cannot live before God? Let us read the answer in our Lord's own words—"I AM THAT BREAD OF LIFE." Yes, brethren, not faith, nor love, nor holiness, nor any thing short of Christ Himself, can feed the spiritual being of man. It is HE who must be taken into the soul; and all things which stop short of Him are not nourishment;—are but the meat that perisheth, not that which endures unto everlasting life. To apprehend Christ as mine, to lay hold on Him by the hand of faith, and feed on Him by spiritual participation in Him, this is the nourishment of the life of the soul. When a man awakes from the sleep of carnal death, the first craving of the

spirit for pardon and peace is satisfied by apprehending Christ in the glorious constitution of His Person, as Man suffering for sin, as God uniting us to the Father. The conviction of His righteousness is brought home by the blessed Spirit to the heart, and appropriated to a man and assimilated to his very being, and on that righteousness he feeds. And the more his cravings increase, the richer and fuller is Christ in imparting Himself for their supply. Do we need wisdom? In Him, the babe becomes wiser than the teacher; the simple than the prudent of this world. Do we need holiness? In Him we have the gift of the Sanctifier, flowing down to us from His Godhead, possessing and enlightening and renewing our manhood. Do we want a perfect pattern, to guide our lives, not by dry and heartless precept, but by deeds and words warm from a heart full of love? This too we have in Him. Do we want a dear friend, accessible at all times, who though He was despised and rejected of men, will never despise the meanest nor reject the unworthiest who come to Him, but will be touched with a feeling of all their infirmities? All this again we have in Him. There is no want of the spiritual life, for which Christ has not a supply: no depth of human sorrow, which He has not fathomed; no degree of divine compassion, and love, and power, which He will not feel and exert for His brethren in the flesh. Here then is the Bread

of Life ; and it is feeding on the Bread of Life, to grasp and make our own, and assimilate into our own inner being, all that He has done, and is doing, and will do for us : so that the true member of Christ may say, “ I live, yet not I. but Christ liveth in me : and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me³. ”

When then we pray “ Give us this day our daily bread,” we pray that we may live this day on Christ, in all those blessed senses in which He, His finished work, may become food to our souls. Would that we more of us knew Christ in this inner personal connexion with our spirits, so as to long for Him day by day, and look for our share of Him, as we look for our bodily food ! I fear, beloved, that sadly too many of us are careful for the things of the body, but uncared for those of the spirit. The former are to us a stern and present reality, the latter a decent and reverend fiction, which it is well not to disturb, but which none think of adopting as real. O let such reflect on what they say, or suffer to be said for them, when this prayer is uttered. They ask for the daily bread of the spirit : but while this bread is given them freely, in the possession of bibles, and churches, they will not even reach out a hand to make it theirs ;

³ Gal. ii. 20.

their bibles are unread, their church unattended, and themselves yet mere natural men.

But notice, in this spiritual import also, how humbly and modestly we are taught to make our requests known to God. We do not pray for long days to come, nor for high graces far above us, but only for our daily bread—just so much food for our spirits, as God may see fit in His mercy to send us. We are taught to leave the rest to Him. Nourished and strengthened by feeding on Christ, for temptations, for afflictions, for duties, what more can we desire of Him that will not follow as His part of the covenant of grace? If we are found in His ways, why should we distract our minds with anxiety about our final salvation? If we feed upon Christ, we know by His own promise that we have eternal life, and He will raise us up at the last day.

SERMON XIII.

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

1854.

ROM. i. 16.

“ I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ : for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.”

I HAVE been speaking to you for two or three Sundays past, on some of the petitions in the Lord's prayer. In so doing, I drew your attention to the associative spirit of the Gospel; how it teaches us to lay aside selfishness and put on largeness of heart; to look not every man on his own things, but also on the things of others.

It may be well to-day that we should regard the other side, and contemplate some of the matters in which the Gospel exercises a strictly individual power over and in each separate man. It is of no slight importance, especially in these our days, to clear and refresh our ideas with regard to these two great branches of the Gospel's influence; to be able to distinguish wherein it is individual, and wherein associative.

By confusing these, fatal mistakes have been made, and that by scholars and theologians, leading even to apostasy from God's truth as delivered in His Word; from which, and any approach to which, it is my earnest endeavour to guard and forewarn you.

The circumstances under which my text was written, are very important to its due consideration. In the great metropolis of the heathen world, there were many who were "beloved of God, called to be saints." Thither, according to the testimony of their own writers, flowed together men of every shade of opinion and religious profession; and thither had travelled various persons converted by the apostolic teaching of St. Paul himself, or of his colleagues. That up to this time no Apostle had been at Rome, we infer with certainty from this very epistle, wherein St. Paul states¹, that it was not his practice to build, where another had already laid the foundation. The Roman church was as yet a confluence of individual believers, to whom the Apostle of the Gentiles longed to come in person, that he might impart to them some spiritual gift; that is, as he interprets it, that he might be comforted together with them, by the mutual faith of both them and himself². From the fulfilment of this his wish, he had repeatedly been kept back in the

¹ Ch. xv. 20.² Ch. i. 11, 12.

providence of God; and at this time we find him at Corinth, building up the church which he had previously founded in that city. Meanwhile he professes, "I am ready to preach the Gospel to you that are at Rome also." It was a bold profession. And it was not made by an ignorant, nor by a light-minded man. He knew well of what place he was speaking. At Rome was not only the concentration of all earthly power, able to prohibit and crush the preaching of the Gospel,—not only the majesty of all imperial splendour, which would make men reject with scorn a message of salvation so meanly borne and originated,—not only the interested hostility of the partisans of paganism, whose position and hope of gain the Gospel would abolish,—but one element even more fatal to its prospects than these, that universal scepticism, that abandonment of all fixed points of belief, that hollowness of heart, and emptiness of hope, and deadness of affection, which of all things presents the most impregnable barrier to the progress of the Gospel of faith, and hope, and love. And if we add to all these adverse influences, the moral state of the metropolis, then in the third year of Nero, described by its own writers as a sink and centre of all the iniquity and impurity on earth, we can hardly conceive a more unpromising place than this, in which the Apostle professes himself ready to begin his missionary labour.

Nor if we consider the character of the Gospel itself, was his prospect any more hopeful. It would come before the Romans as an illegitimate and disowned offset from the superstition of the Jews, which they already hated and despised. Its Founder had died by a mode of execution reserved for the meanest of slaves, and after which they were named in contempt. Its preachers were men of no account, fanatics from an obscure province of the empire, affirming one Jesus to be alive, whom other men believed to be dead. On the other hand, its assumptions were immense; no less than to reveal God, whom the great masters of Grecian philosophy had sought in vain, and concerning whom the polished literature of Rome had settled that He either did not exist, or could never be discovered;—no less than to save man with an everlasting salvation, a proposition sure to be met with mockery by the learned and indifference by the multitude; no less than to abolish all distinction of race or privilege, and gather all men into one brotherhood, an idea which had never dawned on the most sanguine of the improvers of mankind. Moreover, its pretensions were rigidly exclusive. It knew of no universal fraternization of mythologies, no “*religiones licitæ* ;”—with *it*, there was but one God, and one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus; and none other name was given under heaven among men, whereby

we were to be saved. And its requirements were of the most inconvenient and intrusive kind; it would allow of no indifferentism, no walking by the light of nature and leaving religion for the magistrate and the multitude.—but absolutely demanded the surrender of the heart and life—the denial of those lusts from which the pleasures of society derived their zest—and the aiming at a holiness utterly alien from all the thoughts and practices of the time.

So that in whatever light we view it, the Gospel of Christ seemed, in itself, to be in direct opposition to the tendencies and feelings of the great city where St. Paul longed to plant it. Intellectually, it had no point of appliance, for it appealed to the mean and ignorant; morally, it condemned society, universally impure, by demanding purity of heart and life; and it jarred on the very pride of human nature itself, by laying down unwelcome dogmatic truth as necessary to be received in humility, by all its disciples.

Nor can we for a moment suppose our Apostle to have been unaware of any of these facts. He who had before this made that wonderful speech at Athens, so exquisitely adapted to gain the attention, and disarm the opposition, of the frivolous but subtle Athenians, could not have known less of the polity and character of that far greater city, whose privileges he had

inherited, and whose laws and customs set the pattern for the world.

With all this before him, he makes that which we have characterized as a bold profession, "I am ready to preach the gospel to you which are at Rome also."

But he who makes the profession, renders a *reason* for it too. "FOR," he says, "I AM NOT ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST, FOR IT IS THE POWER OF GOD UNTO SALVATION TO EVERY ONE THAT BELIEVETH." It is this his reason, which I wish especially to bring before you to-day. It is a most interesting and important one. Observe, I pray you, its grounds. He is about to carry the Gospel where he knew it would meet with opposition and scorn, into the very stronghold of the prince of this world; into the arena of its most solemn and perilous trial. But he is not ashamed of it. And why is he not ashamed of it? Many reasons might be imagined. Let us suggest some few of them, by way of making the real one clearer. We may well believe, that St. Paul was not without prophetic insight into the future triumphs of Christianity and of the professing Christian Church. And some might be disposed to think, that he might have disowned all shame for the Gospel, on the ground of these future triumphs; that he might have looked on to the time when a bishop of this very city should unite in himself the imperial and the priestly power,—when the

Pontifex Maximus of the coming age should reign over the Christian world, putting down and setting up kings, and making laws for the minds and consciences of men. That were indeed a subject for pride, if such a view of the effects of the Gospel could be regarded by him with complacency. But I find no trace of it here. It is not because the great city, which now rose upon his mind in all her abominations of heathendom, would one day be the vaunted ecclesiastical metropolis of Christendom,—not because nobler temples than pagan Rome ever beheld should hereafter bear the cross on their summits, and the arts now prostituted to the praise of false deities should vie with one another in bringing their fairest tribute to add lustre to the triumphs of the faith:—I find none of these things alleged, when he says that he is not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ. But again: he himself, specially prompted by the Spirit of God, gave utterance after this, in his writings, to lofty and glorious descriptions of the Christian Church. It is with him, as also with St. Peter, a dwelling of God by the Spirit, built up of living stones: a comely body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, making increase to the edifying of itself in love: nay more, a glorious and perfect bride of Christ, not having spot nor wrinkle nor any such thing³. But does he here

³ See Eph. ii. 21; iv. 16; v. 27; 1 Pet. ii. 5.

bring forward all or any of these blessed truths respecting the Church, as his reason why he is not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ? Not one. He comes down,—O tell it not in modern Rome, nor in the circles of high ecclesiastical pretension among ourselves,—he comes down from all these public considerations—he does not even choose the real glories of the Church as his ground of boasting,—but when he wants to put forth the brightest flower and gem of the Gospel, that of which, if all else shamed him, he would never be ashamed, he descends into that despised and coerced individual being of man,—that mind which has no right to think for itself, that conscience whose scruples churches and councils have overridden, that heart whose affections have been scorned and put out of the question in this matter,—that private judgment which we hear so often scoffed at and disparaged. These things which are so generally accounted last, our Apostle places first: and he is not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, because it is *the power of God unto salvation* to EVERY ONE that believeth. If you or I had first ventured on such a sentiment in these days, should we not be set down as disparagers of the Church of Christ? Should we not be accounted upholders of the individual against church authority—as persons whose vision was blinded to the beauty of the great Christian association, deriving grace from Christ through a succession of ministers, and from

sacramental ordinances? But thank God it is not my saying nor yours, but the utterance of the Holy Spirit. And the Apostle who, in the power of that Spirit, placed it on record, made it the subject and argument of this his great master epistle, which is but a following out through all its details, and a clearing from all objections, of the primary and fundamental proposition, "The Gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth."

Let us then humbly approach the truth here declared to us, and ascertain what it implies. St. Paul, you see, was not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, because he knew that it was a transforming and upholding power in individual men: that its preaching would bring about belief of it in individual hearers: and that in the case of every one who thus believed, it was the power of God unto salvation: that the heart, receiving Christ as its Saviour and Lord by faith, would feed upon Him and drink of His Spirit, and become clasped in the everlasting arms of His covenant, and so be assimilated to His image, and kept by His power, the man being begotten again into a new and glorious spiritual life, struggling indeed through imperfection and trial and difficulty here, but upheld through all, and issuing in perfect and glorious life in the presence of the Lord hereafter. This made him not ashamed: because he knew that every hearty recipient of the Gospel would be thus

born again, thus changed, thus upheld: because he looked forward, not to the magnificence of earthly temples, nor to the processions of mitred princes, but to the glorious gathering at the coming of the Lord of all those who should be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation: when he should stand, and they his glory and his joy, at the right hand of the King, and hear those words, "Come ye blessed of my Father."

Now what I would have you notice is, that this action of the Gospel on which he grounds his profession, is not action belonging to the Church as a corporation, nor derived from ministration of any kind as issuing from the aggregated body of Christians, but that it is exercised on men as separate individuals, and that the Christian corporation is composed of men who have been thus separately and individually acted on by the Holy Spirit of God: so that Christians do not derive their holiness from the Church, but it derives its holiness from its individual members: and the grace of its sacraments and other ordinances is not acquired by virtue of any power inherent in or transmitted through its ministers, but by virtue of the faith of its individual members, spiritually apprehending and feeding on Christ in those sacraments, and growing in the knowledge of and likeness to Him by those ordinances. And here is, in point of fact, the root and ground of

the question between us and our opponents. Put it how you will, it must come to this at last,—that the one man holds the saving grace of God to be a gift to the individual man, appropriated by the turning of his heart to God in believing on his Saviour,—and the other holds it to be a gift to the Church, which she dispenses to individual men, and which they appropriate by participation in her ordinances, and submitting to her authority. That both these, participation in the Church's ordinances and submission to her authority, are duties and means of grace, the two men hold in common ; but as to the source of the grace and the reason of the duty, they differ as widely as it is possible to differ. And no compromise can be made in this matter between the two. You cannot bridge over the gulf between the sacramentalist and the spiritualist ; between, in simpler terms, the church of Rome and her friends, the church of England and her friends. We hold the Church to be a congregation of faithful men, partakers of Christ after a spiritual manner, who can please God only by acts which spring from faith in Christ, and are not bound to receive any thing as requisite to salvation which is not read in the word of God nor may be proved thereby :—and they hold the Church to be a body formally constituted, having a visible infallible head on earth, and dispensing grace through delegation from Christ, in union

with that Head, and in obedience to his dictation as to articles of faith. On which of these sides the declaration of the Apostle is to be ranged, is plain to us all. He rests the glory and the power of the Gospel on its influence on EVERY ONE WHO BELIEVETH: that is, on its persuasion of and acceptance by the heart and mind of each individual man. You see also what great results such an admission brings in its train. At once, the individual responsibility of man assumes a sacred and inviolable character. If it be so, all attempts to coerce and subjugate men's consciences in the matter of religious belief, are not only as we know futile and vain, but are sins against that liberty of reception of His Gospel which God has made our common inheritance. Let the Gospel be offered to all freely and fully. Whosoever believes on the Lord Jesus Christ shall be saved. Let the fairest form of Church order, and the purest and most Scriptural ritual, be proposed for their acceptance: in so far as they accept it not, they are losers by it; the completeness of the Christian character suffers, the leaven is not so advantageously placed for leavening the whole mass of society,—Christian charity is wounded by mutual distrust and division. But the acceptance of the Gospel, and of all that belongs to the Gospel, must be free and unforced,—the resignation of the heart, with its desires and affections, to God.

And now let us remember, that not St. Paul only, nor every Christian minister only, but every Christian man and woman among us, is set for the declaration and promulgation of the Gospel. Some are called upon to preach its truths—all, to proclaim their power by the example of a holy life. And this, if not as in former days, amidst persecution, yet with no change as regards the disposition of the world towards the hearty reception of the Gospel. Man by nature is now as he was then, indisposed towards divine truth ; and however much the indirect influence of Christianity may have improved society, his opposition will shew itself in one form or other. And if we consider our own peculiar circumstances here, we shall find that the hearty and earnest Christian needs firm ground to stand on in his witness for Christ's Gospel. We are placed in this great haunt of mankind, this confluence of opinions of every sort, where all is canvassed and criticised ; where if imposture prevails, it is not because it is not observed and detected, but because the weak abound as well as the strong. In such a place we are to shew, that we are not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ. We are to stand here as his soldiers and servants in the nineteenth century, as St. Paul did in the first, and to claim for his Gospel that renovating and saving power which he did. And on what are we to found our boldness, and our claim ? When we

profess that we are not ashamed of the Gospel, and men ask us for our reason, to what shall we refer them? Shall we send them to the history of the Church? Nay it seems to me, that every Christian has abundant reason to be ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, if it is to be thus judged. The Church had a mission entrusted to her by her ascending Lord—"Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature¹." How has she fulfilled it? Near upon two thousand years have passed over her: she has had wealth almost unbounded, power greater than that of the kings of the earth; she has had energy and eloquence on her side, and secular enterprize ready to take her by the hand—and what has she done towards fulfilling this most sacred injunction? What has been all her missionary exertion, compared with the activity and self-denial of one desolating war? what all her expenditure on her Redeemer's cause, compared with that bestowed on any one great human scheme for convenience or gain? Another sacred command she inherited from our Lord—"Love one another"—"by this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another²." Has the Church, in its actual history, fulfilled this blessed command? Has the world without taken knowledge of its members that they have been with Jesus, by

¹ Mark xvi. 15.

² John xiii. 34, 35; xv. 12. 17.

seeing their resemblance to Him in love? Alas, what answer shall we render? Have we not every reason for shame, when we confess that hatred, wrath, strife, emulations, and even bloodshed, have tracked the footsteps of the Church down from the first ages until now? No, brethren, it is not in the history of the Church in the days past, that we can ground our defence of the Gospel. Nor again is it in any of the achievements of that Church, as an outward visible body, in the time present. She is, alas, what she ever has been. When poor, or afflicted, or persecuted, she calls on the name of the Lord, and is found witnessing for Him, and shining brightly in the world: but when firmly established and at ease, she becomes, as she ever has done, worldly, and cold-hearted, and slow to move for good, and forgetful of her Saviour and His work.

So that when we say, as we are bound to say, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ,"—we must not look for the justification of our boast to associated Christianity. In its history and its character, we find no reason for boasting, but much for shame and confusion of face.

Is this our profession then a vain one—a boast which admits of no justifying—an idle challenge with none to appear to support it? No, indeed, brethren. It has full and sufficient ground, even the same on which the Apostle rested his. And this is its ground, that the

Gospel of Christ is still "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." We cannot shew the kingdoms of the world become the kingdoms of the Lord and of His Christ: we cannot shew Christian Churches walking in love as dear children: but we can shew (and O that every witness for Christ may be himself a bright example of it) the individual character still renewed by the power of faith—the disobedient man turned to the wisdom of the just,—the servant of mammon become the servant of God—the flesh of the leper come again as the flesh of a little child—the spiritually impotent raised up and receiving strength, and walking and leaping and praising God. This is the reason why we are not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; not ashamed, though the track of the Church has been marked not with peace but with the sword: not ashamed, though two-thirds of this fair world yet lie in outer darkness: not ashamed, though the greater part of Christendom has fallen away from the worship of the Creator to that of the creature: not ashamed, though every effort among us to assert high ecclesiastical principles uniformly issues in fresh defalcation to that great apostasy:—because we find that in the midst of all this, the Gospel has not lost one atom of its life-giving power—that wherever a soul lays hold on the Redeemer by faith, whether in the corrupt Church of Rome, or in the reformed

Church of England, or in any of the endless varieties of religious opinion and communion, or apart from all visible companies of Christians,—there enters a new life unto God, a change into the Lord's image, a glorious progress in holiness here, tending to perfection hereafter.

Here then let us take our stand, and let nothing move us from it. Be our first principle, in days of distraction and questioning, that the gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation unto EVERY ONE THAT BELIEVETH: that in the individual heart is the direct action of the Holy Spirit begun, in His conviction of sin, righteousness, and judgment. This being put in the first place, all else that is lovely and of good report may safely follow. On this foundation I might easily shew, if our present time allowed, how the fair fabric of the visible Church is erected, her ordinances, her ministry, her discipline, her charitable construction of the state of her professing members. This point being once firm and beyond doubt in your minds, many of those things which have been a snare to them who are in error, may safely be enlisted in the service of the Gospel of Him, who came not to reject, but to sanctify, all the powers and faculties of man.

And above all, while we thus put in the foremost place the change of the individual heart, and assert it as the immediate and primary work of the Spirit of God, O let us

each take heed, that the Gospel of Christ is to OURSELVES the power of God unto salvation—that Christ dwells in our own hearts by faith,—and that we, humbly serving Him in daily self-devotion and love, are shewing to the society in which we are cast in this great city, and to men around us wherever we are, that our profession is not an idle boast—but that we are, in very deed, NOT ASHAMED of the Gospel of Christ.

SERMON XIV.¹

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

1854.

MATT. xxii. 21.

“Render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar’s,—and unto God the things that are God’s.”

I HAVE purposely omitted, in citing this text, the word “therefore,” which connects it with the incident that gave occasion to the reply. Its circumstances will come before us, please God, in the regular course of our exposition this afternoon. But I wish this morning to call your attention to the words themselves. They contain a very important command of our Lord and Master to all His disciples,—which we, as among those disciples, should do well to meditate on, and lay to heart.

And especially is this the case at the present time. When all goes on smoothly, and our

¹ This Sermon may be had separately, price sixpence: the profits to be appropriated to the Patriotic Fund.

duty to the state is little more, as felt or known by most of us, than the ordinary payment of a portion of our substance for our preservation and comfort, such a command as this rests in the pages of our Bibles, and seems to have no imperative voice for us: each man goes soberly on his course as a quiet citizen, and the performance of obligations which no one thinks of repudiating, attracts no notice, and wins no praise.

But times may arise, when all this is otherwise: when the existing generation first becomes aware, how deep the springs of duty lie: when we see that no self-denial is too great, no sacrifice too vast, for loyal citizens to make: when neither the loss of all the comforts and refinements of life, nor banishment from that home where others are still pursuing the occupations of peace, nor separation, with the risk of final severance, from those they love, is allowed for an instant to weigh in the balance against the sacred call of duty to the land that bore them, and the laws under which in God's Providence they have been placed. And in such times it is, that we first see the grandeur and majesty of obedience: that it is a far nobler thing to reverence order, and stand in our appointed places, and be found in the ranks which God has assigned us, than to rise to the highest aim of ambition, to wield the widest extent of power, or revel in the most uninterrupted self-enjoy-

ment. At such times also, a command like this in my text speaks to us in tones unheard before. They were the words of Him who saw and knew all things. All the course of human circumstances lay open to His eye. By Him kings reign, and princes decree justice: and the history of the world is but its gradual subjugation to Him. And as all times of His Church were in His view when He spoke these words, so do they come forth from their hiding-place when need is, and say to His people, "This is the way, walk ye in it;"—shewing them, amidst perils and difficulties, what is the will of their God and Father respecting them.

In endeavouring thus to apply our text to-day, we shall see that it regulates our conduct towards two great powers set over us: the power to whom is entrusted secular rule here below, and that which exercises supreme rule over all above.

Let us treat of these in order. "God hath made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on all the face of the earth: and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation²." The assignment of the land and climate where we live, of the physical and mental character of our race, of those laws and constitutions which have accompanied our development as a people, is from

² Acts xvii. 26.

Him. In the course of His Providence, our rulers have received their power. It is He who has ordained our position with regard to the nations by whom we are surrounded ;—it is He, from whom flow down all the obligations to resolve and to act, which those relations render necessary. He makes peace, and creates war. The ambition of men is overruled by Him ; and when we can least trace Him, He often is busiest among us.

And the Christian's lesson from all this, is very plain. The powers that be, are ordained of God. Whoso obeyeth the power, obeyeth the ordinance of God. The Christian is not left, it is true, to drift away after the misguided course of an unprincipled and ungodly ruler. The law of his God is in his heart, and contrary to that law no ruler may command him. He may not aid the tyrant in his tyranny, nor abet the oppressor in his oppression : as the Christian child with its parent, so the Christian subject with his sovereign : all obedience must be IN THE LORD³.

And let it not be supposed for a moment, that such a qualification opens the door to licence and anarchy. In most matters of practice, the will of God is very plainly declared, and acknowledged by the human laws of Christendom : whereas in mere differences of religious opinion, it is not for an enlightened government

³ Eph. vi. 1.

to interfere. So that cases can hardly or but seldom arise, where a Christian is bound to refuse obedience to the secular power set over him. Let us however take one in point, for an illustration. Hundreds, we hope thousands, of Christian men have gone out from us to war, in humble obedience to their country's laws. They have shewn us how far they will carry that obedience: that they place on it no ungenerous limits, nor bound it by their own convenience or self-preservation. They have not even withheld their lives, but have laid them down in the discharge of this their duty. History has no nobler examples to shew of gallant self-sacrifice, nor of unwearied and almost superhuman devotion. Yet, let but an order (which thank God is impossible) go forth from hence, commanding them, in obeying their country, to disobey their God: let but one plain behest of that divine Word, which is the light to their feet and the lamp to their paths, be contravened,—and it would be seen, that they who now with such sublime courage lay down their lives in obedience, would then, with courage equally sublime, lay down those lives in resistance,—or rather in obedience still, but to the law of One higher than princes.

But as I said, in the government of a Christian people such a case is next to impossible; and our attention is all concentrated on the other side of our duty—that of OBEDIENCE:—

that of rendering to our country, in the solemn crisis in which God has placed us, with all heartiness of affectionate devotion, those things which her necessities require of us. For those who have gone forth from us, no exhortation is needed: and if I mention them now, it is for example's sake. They went, not because they willed it, but because their country willed it. They were free men, intelligent men, capable of forming, and free to express, each man his own opinion: yet in obedience they were, and are, of one heart and one mind,—standing side by side in face of the common foe,—scorning the dangers which their caution hardly magnified, and the death which perhaps their counsels strove to avert. They were peaceful men,—loving their hearths and their homes,—loving their country's rural scenes of repose, and the busy security of her haunts of unwarlike commerce: yet they have taken their place where the din of the combat is incessant, amidst the hurry of hostile alarms,—where none speaks of comfort, and there is no rest but the grave.

Thus their part is done: and, whether for those who are taken, or those who are left to us, we have nothing to regret, but every thing to be thankful for: nothing to wish, save that every man, when his hour comes, may be found as humbly serving his God, as he is nobly and gallantly serving his country. But it is we who remain at home, we on whom their bright

example shines across the broad continent, that need reminding and exhorting. If *they* have done their duty so well, it is not for us to be behind them.

When we assembled here in humiliation before God at the beginning of this war,—it was my duty to speak to you of the solemnity of the circumstances on which we were entering; the sacrifices which would be required of us: the bitter cup of suffering which many among us must be appointed to drain.

Now, these things are coming upon us as realities. Weekly and daily, the interest and anxiety of the time is drawing a closer circle round us, and we are advancing deeper and deeper into the mysterious clouds and darkness, with which God's doings are veiled. Unexampled as have been our preparations already made, and great the deeds already done, none can help feeling an inward conviction, that our struggle is but begun; that more and greater remain behind. And it is therefore the part of the Christian minister at such a time to suspend his ordinary teaching, that he may speak to his people of that which is in all their hearts, and urge on them that frame of mind, and those acts, which may best beseem their high and holy calling, and bring glory to our God.

“RENDER TO CÆSAR THE THINGS THAT ARE CÆSAR’S.” These words were said to a people,

on whose coin was stamped the image and superscription of a foreign conqueror. We dwell in our own beloved land, which for nearly eight hundred years has known no conqueror's yoke: under laws which have grown up with our social growth, and strengthened with our national strength: ruled by a sovereign whom we as cheerfully obey, as we universally revere and heartily love her. What then do our country and our sovereign require of us?

First of all, they have a right to expect FIRMNESS and CONSISTENCY. Do we really know what we have undertaken? Do we reflect, that as a Christian people, among the foremost in the advancement of all that is good and beneficial to mankind, we have deliberately embarked in aid of this great struggle of the weak against the strong,—not for one nation only, but for our whole race;—not for a few years only, but for all succeeding time? And do we suppose that a conflict of such magnitude, against such a foe, for such an end, can be finished in a few short weeks, or with one effort only? Can we expect aught, but that our course will be marked with delays of hope, and even partial reverses, where the contending parties are such mighty nations, and the resources of each so unbounded? Can we imagine, that in this case only, war will forego its stern prerogative,—that we shall receive back again unscathed those loved and honoured ones

who went forth from us? In all these things, I hope and trust we have counted the cost: and that if, in cases of private anxiety, we sympathize with the distracted heart, afloat upon hope and fear, we shall suffer no such alternations to affect the national mind, but maintain a firm and steady attitude in the presence of uncertainty, as far from pride as from dejection, cheered indeed by hope, as it is chastened by fear, but with its tranquillity unimpaired by either. If there is courage bright and unsullied among those who serve in the field, let there be courage also among those who remain here: courage to wait God's time, and submit to God's way of bringing about the result. This is the least that our country and our sovereign expect of us:—not to dishonour them at home by feebleness of heart and fickleness of purpose, any more than our countrymen are doing abroad.

And for those who wish to fulfil this expectation, one Scripture maxim is most important—“Judge nothing before the time⁴.” It is the practice of men of small minds and narrow views, to be ever rushing to unfavourable conclusions respecting matters as yet incomplete, and even if complete, far beyond their province and capacity. How often do we find, in some course of human action, one link at last sup-

⁴ 1 Cor. iv. 5.

plied, when it could safely be shewn, which joins the apparently severed parts, and makes all consistent. And if in other matters this is so, much more in the conduct of war, where so many things are of necessity concealed.

Next in order,—and I mention each of these not as implying their absence or neglect, but as stirring up your minds by way of remembrance,—our country expects of us a cheerful and generous spirit of SELF-DENIAL. Already, we are beginning to awake to the necessity of this—we are beginning to see, what vast efforts will be required. Let such a conviction be still more widely spread, and more deeply grounded. Every nation possesses examples of heroic self-devotion of person or property to her cause. Some such, and among the foremost which future history will record, we ourselves have seen in the course of the present war. During the week just ended we have learned, that that noble band, some of whom were worshipping with us in this church three Sundays since, have commenced their labours among our sick and wounded soldiers. We may not be called on to follow them in person—though I trust that many will yet be found to do so: but thus far at least let us follow them; for every necessity of our country, for every act of charity, and mercy, and devotion of our person, or our substance, which this great conflict necessitates, let us be found as ready to respond

to, yea to anticipate, the call of duty,—as they were. Let us moreover feel no surprise, if such efforts are found to entail unlooked for and unwelcome privations. Should our dwellings be in consequence deprived of some luxuries which have become comforts to us, and some comforts which long peace has made as necessities, every such loss should be accounted a gain,—a satisfaction deducted from the lower, and added to the higher sensibilities of our being. Should our metropolis be shorn for a few years of a portion of her splendour, it will not be her loss, but her gain: not to her disparagement, but to her infinite honour. The absence of pomp, as the result of public self-denial for a great and noble end, will cast on her more lustre, and place her higher among the nations of the earth, than did ever the magnificence, with which she has heretofore dazzled the eyes of the stranger.

And if our country requires of us cheerfulness and readiness under such sacrifices as these, we are not wholly beyond her call, when sterner and sadder bereavements befall us. There are duties belonging to the MOURNER, which we must not now forget. The springs of those duties are found indeed in that higher portion of my subject, which will presently come before us: but their outward expression, and the benefit of their cheering and fertilizing streams, are among the demands of our country from us all. As it is in times of private grief

that individual religious trust is best put to the trial,—that we discern, not what a man professes to be, but what he really is,—so in seasons of public mourning, the spirit and principle of a nation are tried. Let us shew, by the firmness with which we bear our bereavements, by the absence of all hasty and fretful condemnation of those, whose positions of responsibility are in our minds connected with them,—and above all by our prompt and generous supply of our best, though utterly inadequate, reparation to those who are left destitute,—that we know what our country expects of us as mourners, and are resolved not to be wanting to her.

And here, it seems to me, do we feel, more than in any other part of our subject, the power and mercy of Him, who in laying down our most solemn duties as citizens, did not suffer us to stop with these, nor end His exhortation here: but added, as was His constant practice, a heavenly, to an earthly obligation: mounted up beyond the mere occasion then present, into the laws and wants of our whole being, for another world as well as for this: and commanded us not only to render unto Cæsar those things which are Cæsar's, but added, "AND UNTO GOD THE THINGS THAT ARE GOD'S."

When, in that memorable struggle which the ablest of Grecian historians has recorded, the remains of the first slain in the war were brought

forth, in their coffins of cypress, into the fairest suburb of Athens, the great orator of the day took upon him to console the bereaved⁵. His polished and eloquent words are familiar to every scholar. He spoke to the parents of the fallen: he reminded them that they knew their children had been born into a world of chances, and that the happiest chance was his, whose measure of life and of glory had been the same. He encouraged the younger among those parents, in the hope that their loss might be, if never forgotten, yet hereafter supplied: and the elder, in the remembrance how long their beloved ones had been spared to them, and the reflection that their few declining days would be gilded by the glory of the departed. "For," he added, "love of honour alone never grows old: and in the inactive evening of life, it is not gain, as some say, but honour, that is the chief delight." To the children or brothers of the slain, he pointed out their bright example: to their widows he knew no better comfort to offer, than that their great glory was the modest course of ordinary duty, each in her unmentioned retirement.

Such was his consolation: touching indeed and beautiful, on many accounts: but on no account more than on this, that in its very

⁵ The allusion is to the funeral oration of Pericles, recorded in the 2nd book of the history of the Peloponnesian war by Thucydides.

beauty it shews us, how far only the consolation of the world can go ;—how blessed are the eyes, that see the things which we see : how blessed our ears, which have heard His voice, who has brought life and immortality to light. Beautiful as all this is,—“THE LORD GAVE, AND THE LORD HATH TAKEN AWAY” far surpasses it all. The knowledge, that every affliction and bereavement is in the course of His gracious dealing with us, who spared not His own Son, but freely gave Him on our behalf ; who is perfecting us by sufferings, as the Captain of our Salvation was perfected, for His glory—how rich is it with abundant consolation—what balm is it to the wound, where it is really applied to the bleeding heart ! How full of hope do such convictions make us for those that are gone, how full of resignation and peace for ourselves.

To render to God the things that are God's, under such circumstances, is to acknowledge His sovereignty, and to recognize His love : to take Him at His own word, and be persuaded, as matter of fact, that all things are working together for good to those that love Him ; to inherit the blessed resolution of one who said, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him⁶.” It is, to look forward to the day to which St. Paul pointed on the Thessalonians, when they were disposed to sorrow without

⁶ Job xiii. 15.

hope, when “them that sleep in Jesus, God will bring with Him,”—and to “comfort one another with these words⁷.”

“Render unto God the things that are God’s.” Over all the departments of duty to our country, which I have mentioned, does this higher command cast back new light, and invest them with a character not for time only, but for eternity. Let us remember, that if our country expects of us all these things of which I spoke, our God has a yet higher claim: if we have duties as citizens, it is only as CHRISTIAN citizens that we can perform those duties adequately or aright. It is not enough for one of us to be a patriot: he must be a Christian also. Or rather, he cannot be a real patriot, without being a real Christian.

And we live in days when this truth, though not yet acted on as it ought to be, is at least beginning to be generally acknowledged. It was once thought, that to make a soldier religious, was to unman him: that one who mourned for sin,—who served the Prince of peace,—who obeyed a law paramount to all earthly obligations, would neither have nerve, nor inclination, nor the flexibility of discipline, for the stern duties of war. And the same kind of prejudice at one time pervaded the counting-house, and the public office. It was fancied, that religion put men out of humour

⁷ 1 Thess. iv. 14—18.

with their common duties, and raised them above their stations in life. But all this has now passed away. It is at length acknowledged, that the religious soldier is the best and the bravest soldier, and the religious man, in every capacity where he is found, the best discharger of his common duties.

And if we know these things, happy are we if we do them. One of the duties which we owe to God at this solemn time is, to SERVE HIM, EACH ONE OF US, WITH ALL OUR HEARTS. Depend on it, no one looks on this war aright, who does not look on it as a religious man,—as a servant of God. This is not a time to be trifling with our professions. Either we do believe our religion, or we do not. If we do not, in the name of common honesty let us cast aside that on which we have, in such days, no spare energy to waste, no idle time to bestow,—and let us set, with all our might, about our country's work as men of the world, in the spirit of the Athenian orator of old, and refusing all light but that which he had: if we do,—then in the name of Him whom we serve, let each one of us be found in His ways, acknowledging Him and doing His work. And in acknowledging Him, let us remember, that it is the part of a Christian nation, to reflect and meditate on His ways;—to ask themselves “Why is God leading us through this season of anxiety and of sorrow?”;—to “hear the rod,

and Him who hath appointed it⁸.” It may be difficult, to assign God’s ultimate reasons:—many of His counsels are beyond our grasp.—He may have purposes with ourselves and other nations, which we cannot yet divine:—but even here, be it our humble endeavour to trace His hand as the course of affairs passes onward, and to be ready with our efforts for Him and His Kingdom, as every opening is given to us. At the same time, I believe that self-examination will point out to us some things in ourselves, which He may be now correcting. It may be, that He is subjecting our national cold and calculating spirit to this strong exercise of sympathies and anxieties, for our good: that He is digging the fountains of our hearts deeper, and preparing us for a more thorough and entire casting of ourselves into His service in the world. when this storm is over. It may be, that we were becoming too vain of our privileges and advantages, and He is now reminding us, on how slender a thread they hang. Our insular position, and the proud remembrances of our last great conflict, had perhaps rendered us too exclusive in spirit, for the good which we ought to be doing in the world;—and He has, in His providence, cast in our present lot with that very people whom we had learned to regard as our natural foes, and to speak of with a disparagement which they

⁸ Micah vi. 9.

did not deserve,—which the laws of Christian brotherhood did not justify. For these reasons, and others, it may be that He is thus dealing with us: but of His deeper and spiritual purposes, there can be no doubt:—that He is trying and chastening us, and teaching us our dependence on Him, and casting us down from our false confidence in the preservation of peace on earth by human resolution,—in the perfection of our race by intellectual or social amendment,—from all earthly paradises, and courses of unbroken prosperity. And He is saying to us, in a voice which is reaching family after family, and man after man, “In Me is thy help⁹:” “Trust not in man, but in the Lord thy God.”

And O dear brethren, let Him not speak in vain. RENDER TO GOD THE THINGS THAT ARE GOD’S. It may even be, that it is His most merciful, and His *last* warning to us. It may even be, that our course as a people in the history of this world was doomed to be cut short,—but He is now giving us a space for repentance;—that the fate of Britain trembles in His balance, and He yet leaves it to us to determine, into which scale the weight shall be thrown, which shall decide it for ever. One year more of ungodliness and self-indulgence, and carelessness of our ignorant and untaught brethren, and deafness to the calls of charity

⁹ Hos. xiii. 9.

and mercy around us,—one refusal more to listen to His voice now filling earth and heaven,—and the adverse scale may descend,—and Babylon, and Nineveh, and England, be names for future ages to utter together. But away with the unworthy idea:—it must not, and by God's grace it shall not be. We will devote ourselves as one man, to render to Him the things that are His—first, OURSELVES, to serve Him in all holy obedience—then our substance, and our time, to be His and devoted to His glory. We will resolve, not merely with the fast of stated humiliation, important in its place and degree,—but with the fast in which He delighteth, to seek His face, man by man, and family by family,—“loosing the bands of wickedness, undoing the heavy burdens, letting the oppressed go free, and breaking every yoke—dealing our bread to the hungry, and bringing the poor that are cast out to our houses,—when we see the naked, covering him,—and hiding not ourselves from our own flesh¹.”

Then, according to His own promise², shall our light rise in obscurity, and our darkness be as the noonday. Then, by His mercy, shall our present conflicts and anxieties end in rendering us a better and more Christian people,—a blessing to our own, and to the nations of the earth. So shall we have a name and a praise, as the inheritors not only of our fathers' bravery,

¹ Isa. lviii. 6, 7.

² Isa. lviii. 8.

but also of our fathers' earnestness for the truth: not only as the devoted servants of our country, but as the faithful servants of our God.

Thus shall we be found, through these our struggles and tempests, striving and hoping onward for the day, when all conflict shall be over, and war shall be no more; and when all the soldiers and servants of Christ shall share in His everlasting triumph.

SERMON XV.

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

1854.

JER. xxiii. 6.

“This is His name whereby He shall be called, THE LORD [JEHOVAH] OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.”

IN that day, when we all shall stand before God, there will be a great multitude whom no man can number, perfectly spotless even in His searching sight. He who is of purer eyes than to behold evil, will look on them without offence. Nay, more than this: He will delight in them. With joy and gladness shall they be brought, and shall enter into the King's palace, where nothing is admitted that is not blameless, pure and holy. And they shall be for ever with Him. They shall never fall—never stain their white robes with one spot of sin—never tarnish their bright crowns with one speck of earthly rust—never strike a jarring string on their

golden harps, through all eternity. Such will be the righteousness of the saints.

But O what a change is here! These very men came from the world where we live—out of sin and imperfection—out of disease and decay—out of doubts and fears—out of murmurings and backslidings, and a thousand infirmities and errors. And whence came this change? In our annual meditation, this the last Sunday of our Church year, on this great corner text of the Gospel building, let us to-day, among the many shifting aspects which it presents to us under different points of view, choose this one,—in which it illustrates the RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE SAINTS.

How came these bright and glorious beings where they are? Where nothing approaches that is not perfectly holy, how entered this uncounted multitude of sinners? Whence is it that a man passes from pleading and striving for pardon and peace on his sick bed, into the abodes of perfect righteousness above? Whence comes it, that the pious soldier kneels on the sod the morning of the battle, and prays for mercy as a miserable sinner—and in a short hour is triumphing as a blessed saint in glory? Surely it is a most important question: most desirable to you and me to consider and to answer. What a miracle such a journey from darkness to light must be! What a promotion for the man in the ranks of God's universe!

Let us try and see in what way it is brought about.

We said it was a change in *God's sight*—a change so thorough, as to bear even His all-searching eye. And for this to be so, it must be the change made in the very root of the being. No outward correctness merely, no repressing of the outbreaks of evil, while the principle of evil is within, will meet the case. The man, as he lies open to God, is thoroughly and entirely holy. We have no less than this to account for.

First I think we shall be able to make it manifest, that such a change cannot come from a man's self. We all can do much for ourselves in the way of self-government. We can repress, or cut off the occasion of, evil actions, and outward temptations to sin. We can, to a great extent, rule our courses of thought, and by continual practice bring about a considerable change in our habits, both external and internal. But let us allow every thing for this; let us strain it even to the utmost limits of human perfectibility by self-control, and will any one be bold enough to say that self-government will make a man perfectly holy in God's sight? Granted, that the man's moral and spiritual being is improved—granted that he sees the loveliness of a pure and virtuous life, and is moved towards that which he before thought dull and repulsive—but we want very much more than

this. We want something which shall grasp the heart—some influence which shall seize the helm while the vessel is drifting at the mercy of unholy and feeble counsels, and guide it into the haven of peace. We want the affections renovated: purity seated not only on the hands but in the thoughts: we want the whole man drawn upward, and stimulated onward to God: we want, not a mere admiration of a virtuous life, but a hunger and thirst after righteousness generated, which shall draw the man after it to satisfy that appetite, and in satisfying it change him into that on which he feeds. And this cannot come from within a man's own self. Every thing human (it is a saying common as the day) is imperfect: and no imperfect thing will suit our present purpose. We must have a perfect principle of righteousness, a perfect fount of holiness, something into the image of which the saints may be changed, each in his measure and degree, but all without spot or flaw of any kind.

Now if any be disposed to suggest that such a change may be made at death, by the putting off of the sinful body with its affections and lusts, and completed at the resurrection by the putting on of the glorious body,—I answer that I cannot believe death to bring with it any such radical and total change. The change at death doubtless is immense—from conflict to peace—from desire to satisfaction—from yearn-

ing after God to beholding God. Nothing can well be conceived more vast, more glorious, than such a change. Yes—but on what is the change at death dependent, in the case of God's saints? Why, entirely on the reality, and on the amount of progress, of that other change of which we are speaking. According as they are holy here below, so will that change be glorious. Again, what *sort* of a change is it that death brings about? Not a change of heart—not a change of desires, affections, principles—but merely, great as it is, a change of *circumstances*. From conflict to peace;—well then, the battle was going on before: from desire to satisfaction;—then the desire was kindled: from yearning after God to beholding God;—then the strong crying out of the heart and flesh for God had begun here on earth. Death will not make a man righteous—all the purgatorial fire that ever entered into the vain imagination of the Romanist, will never touch the springs of a man's moral and spiritual character: no, never: that belongs to the state of responsibility now going on, and in this state it must be accomplished, if at all. The righteousness of the saints remains after death what it was before, with this difference, that every circumstance which before hindered its development will then be removed, and all will be replaced by circumstances the most favourable possible. Sin and imperfection will have been left behind in the

grave; perfection and spotlessness put on in the resurrection. But the spiritual life goes on throughout, before and after death one and the same in principle, in nature, in acceptability with God.

Well, then, we recur to our question, How is such a life possible for fallen man? It cannot spring from within himself—it cannot be the mere result of death easing him of the body of sin—whence then comes it?

Mankind is a tree tainted at the root. It is not that there are not fair branches—goodly leaves—bright blossoms—vitality and sap in abundance:—but that a taint lies at the root and infects all, so that it brings forth no fruit fit for the master's use. Let the fruit look as tempting as it will, there is a taste of bitterness, which prevents all man's mere natural acts being well-pleasing to God. And this being so, when we see this great multitude thus acceptable to the Father, we earnestly ask, How came this to pass? How has this corrupt tree brought forth good fruit?

Let us carry on the similitude somewhat further. What power can heal this tree? Manifestly, in the ordinary course of God's and nature's laws, no power from without. All the summer's suns, all the showers and dews of heaven, will never eradicate that taint from its root. The only conceivable way would be, if by some wonderful process, its vital sap could be

renewed: if some better and healthier influence could enter into its very root and core, and permeate all its branches with wholesome and fruit-bearing vigour.

Such was the state of our humanity. It had received the taint of sin in its very root. Our first father had sinned. But here comes in the shallow infidel with his scoff, and says "What was that to us?" Go to nature for an answer. Ask of her, in the subordinate divisions of our race, whether the rule hold out—ask, why we know the descendant of Abraham, why the descendant of Ishmael,—why, even at the risk of another scoff, the descendant of Ham to this day? In lesser degree, do not members of one family serve as examples of the same truth, bearing the face, the voice, the gait of the parents? and in that great progenitor in whom all our human race was gathered up and borne, can we believe but that our physical and moral character was bound up, and that when he became tainted, we became tainted too? At all events, so it was—and so it is. The race is tainted. It has its great men, and its noble deeds, and its many many blooms of natural and even moral beauty—but as regards righteousness before God, it is totally powerless; it can bear no fruit well-pleasing to Him.

Now let us drop our figure, for fear the inadequacy of vegetable nature to set forth higher orders of being, confuse and cramp the progress

of our argument. Our race laboured under two disabilities before God: guilt, and powerlessness for good. As we have already said, only from within our race could the cure of both proceed. But obviously, from none of the guilty and powerless themselves. Obviously from no other order of created being; for all orders and ranks of creation are fenced off from one another by insuperable barriers—they may not interchange their faculties nor their liabilities. And if they could, we can conceive of no member of a higher rank of created being, who could, as is absolutely necessary for our purpose, take up into himself our nature, and be as completely, in the imparting of new life, our first father, as Adam was in the imparting of the old life. For such a process, nothing but divine power would suffice. He that created first, must create anew. By the same power, which made the first man a living soul, must the second Adam become a life-giving spirit. And all this within the limits of our race,—that the God whom man had offended, man might satisfy; that as by the disobedience of one man all were made sinners, so by the obedience of one man might all be made righteous¹.

And this mighty thing was undertaken and achieved by the eternal Son of God Himself. He became man. Remember I pray you, or

¹ Rom. v. 18, 19 (Greek).

refer to, our teaching on this point on last Good Friday and other occasions. He became MAN: not an individual human person, bounded by His own responsibilities, accountable to God for Himself and Himself only, which would have done us no good, whatever were the result of His Incarnation: but He took our nature upon Him—our nature entire: as entire as it was in Adam: He entered into its very root and core, and became its second Head. Now mark—He did not take that nature in its *sinful* development, as it then was, and now is, in each member of the human family; this would have been against His very essence and attributes as God, and was unnecessary for His work, nay would have nullified that work: but He did take it subject to all the consequences of the state in which He found it—to temptation,—to infirmity,—to bodily appetites,—to decay, to death. He took it labouring under the heavy weight of guilt in God's sight, though that guilt was not His own; and all the infirmity, all the sin, all the guilt of our race, He bore concentrated on Him in His own human body and soul, united to His divine Spirit. Now His work, from what has been said, was two-fold. First, guilt was to be cleansed. He, bearing all our guilt, bore all our punishment. Divine justice asked no more. That one sacrifice on the cross put away, as in the Father's sight, THE SIN OF THE WORLD. But besides, power for good was to be

implanted. In our nature, He wrought out a perfect righteousness: and He presented Himself before the Father at the end of His course on earth, as the holy and righteous Head of our race, claiming of right, and by the terms of the everlasting covenant, that gift of the Holy Spirit, due by His merits, and become possible by His perfect human righteousness now united to the Godhead.

So then the Lord Jesus becomes the JUSTIFIER of our race,—*i. e.* our clearer from guilt: and the SANCTIFIER of our race,—*i. e.* the giver of the Holy Spirit from the Father, by whom we become holy and changed into the image of God.

I said there was some fear lest the lower image should confine our view of the higher reality—and so indeed it has usually been, and at this very point where we have now arrived. Men hear that Christ Jesus bore the sin of the world—that in Him all sin is taken away,—that in Him the Spirit is fully given to all—and they cannot understand how it is, if this be so, if this complete renovation of our fallen nature have taken place in Him, that ALL are not partakers of it—that all are not, by the effect of His finished work, accounted righteous before God. But when they urge this as a difficulty, they forget the very first laws of spiritual and responsible being. We are not, in matters of change for our spirits, governed, as the lower

tribes of creation, and as we ourselves are in our bodies, by material inflexible laws, ruling as matter of course whole classes indiscriminately—but we are governed by laws suited to the constitution of our responsible and immortal spirits. And their constitution makes it necessary that every action in them for good, every advance upwards, should be accompanied on their part with full consciousness and yielded assent. The merits and finished work of Christ cannot act on men's spirits as better pasture would act on the animal, or better climate on the vegetable, which benefit in each case unconsciously, and by the very law of their lower being—but they must be consciously applied, consciously fed on; the new and life-giving sap will not as a matter of course run into and fertilize the branch, but the living branch must seek that sap, and receive it into its pores, and bear fruit by it, with conscious effort and conscious dependence at every separate stage of its bearing fruit. So that the cleansing merits and sanctifying righteousness of Christ do not cleanse nor sanctify the man who does not seek cleansing, nor apply them to himself, but those only who believe on the Son of God, who by a personal realizing faith grasp for themselves the great central fact of the spiritual life,—“Christ died and lives for me:”—and in the strength of this dependence on Him by faith, walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit.

And now let us for a time contemplate the effect on those who believe. Entering into Christ's finished work, they know Him as JEHOVAH THEIR RIGHTEOUSNESS. In themselves, they are as others. They carry about with them the remnants of a body of sin, and are in conflict with it as long as they are here below. But sin has no dominion over them, nor shall it condemn them in that day. They are accepted in the Beloved. Christ's righteousness is their righteousness, because they are living members of Him the righteous Head, and are regarded by the Father as in Him with whom He is well pleased. His perfect obedience is theirs; they are without spot in the sight of the Father; all their life, so full of soils and imperfections, is not that by or in which they live before Him,—but they are dead, and their life is hid with Christ in God; and when Christ who is their life shall appear, then shall they also appear with Him in glory. And not only is His perfect righteousness theirs so that they have entered into it and are safe, but it is theirs inasmuch as the living sap of His Spirit ever permeates them with its healing and transforming power, changing them gradually into His righteous image. The righteousness of God's Saints is not only imputed, but inherent; but, imputed or inherent, it is all of HIM: He is made to them Righteousness, whether it be the righteousness whereby they stand accepted

before God, or the righteousness whereby they grow in likeness to God: they not only come to the Cross to look on Him and be saved, but they wash in that fountain which flowed forth from His pierced side—the blood whereby comes remission—and the water, which cleanses to holiness.

“This then is His name whereby He shall be called — JEHOVAH OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.” O my brother—O my sister—do you and I call Him by this name? Have we learned the power of the finished work of Christ? I do not ask you any common-place question now. O no! Come with me into the inner presence chamber of your hearts—let us shut to the door and confer on this matter—Here in your solitude, “what think ye of Christ?” What is the garniture of that inner chamber? Do I see there the gaudy tinsel of the world’s esteem covering the walls—is the noisy music of self-applause ever sounding there—or do I see the mercy-seat, and the ark of the covenant, and the sprinkling of that precious blood whose drops are dearer than jewels,—and hear faint sounds of mingled penitence and praise? O brethren, I cannot answer these questions, but you can. Put them not from you; for they are your life.

Do you call Christ, JEHOVAH YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS? What then is your estimate of your own duties, and your performance of them? Remember, this is a matter in which you can-

not go half way—in which you cannot say “I will believe on Christ and be justified from sin—that sounds to me a comfortable doctrine—I should like to get rid of guilt and stand accepted at the last day; but as for the slow and troublesome process of sanctification by Christ’s Spirit, I do not feel disposed to that; it is irksome to me, it savours of legality and formalism; I will rest on the sure rock of sound Christian doctrine, and find joy and grace in believing; let others weary themselves with much serving,—I will sit at the feet of Jesus and learn of Him.” Dear friends, be not deceived: such a thing cannot be here below. Those who put on Christ, must be changed into His image. It is not merely to save you, it is to make you holy, that He has wrought His wonderful work in our flesh. No amount of correct doctrine, no given state of mind or persuasion, will suffice you. “They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts².” You cannot lead lives of self-indulgence and worldliness and vanity, and be of that great multitude of whom we spoke, who by Christ’s righteousness will in that day stand accepted before God.

At the present hour what a solemn thought is this! We choose times when the heart is softened, to come near and drop the word of

² Gal. v. 24.

wholesome advice. In the still evening, after a day of turbulence and disobedience, the fond mother comes to the bedside of her child. The solitude of his chamber is round him, and the presence of God seems nearer. That soft voice speaks, whose reproofs were unheeded before. Then first his heart throbs high with mingled feelings of affection and shame; then first break forth the welcome tears, and the victory of love is won. And now, when two mighty nations are pausing in awful silence for the decree of God—when the festive have ceased from their festivity, and the voice of music is hushed—when pomp has veiled her face, and the proudest among us go softly—now seems the moment for the minister of Christ to draw close to every heart, and pour in the counsels of life. Words unheard before may sink deep now. Life appears different, death appears different, in the presence of such tidings as day after day brings us. Earthly homes are being broken up, earthly plans and schemes scattered to the winds: the affections want a rallying point, the heart needs a stay, the anxious require reassuring, the feeble must be upheld, the mourner asks for comfort. O let us stand in the empty places, and proclaim our message—“JEHOVAH OUR RIGHT-EOUSNESS.” Here is a rallying point for the affections, here a stay for the heart: here is reassurance for the anxious, support for the feeble-minded, comfort for them that mourn.

Come then, and let us return unto the Lord our God. Let us not lose this solemn opportunity. Like the repentant child, let us, in this still hour of meditation, listen to His fatherly voice reproving and inviting us. We have not honoured Him in the fulness of our prosperity: once and twice has He spoken, and we perceived it not; but now He has brought us into the wilderness, and there is pleading with us face to face. May the issue be, in this and in all our congregations, that many may learn to know Christ for themselves, and live to Him; that in the households of many, and in the hearts of many, this may be His name whereby He shall be called,—JEHOVAH OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

SERMON XVI.

ADVENT SUNDAY.

1854.

MATT. vi. 10.

“Thy kingdom come.”

THIS again is one of those wonderful petitions with which our daily prayer to our Father is introduced. It is as simple as it is sublime. It regards not ourselves, but His glory whom we address, and in His glory, the welfare of His creatures. I have reserved it for this day, because we to-day enter the season when we prepare to celebrate His coming. We are beginning our new ecclesiastical year. Let our motto, our watchword this Advent be, **THY KINGDOM COME**. It is such an Advent season, as most of us never saw before. The kingdoms of the earth are troubled. Wars, and rumours of wars, are around us and upon us. Some among us are full of hope—others failing for

fear; some, eager and approving; others cautious, and doubtful of our course; but all, anxious, and grave, possessed by strange and busy thoughts. In such a season of storm and anguish, of trust, and distrust, of earthly kingdoms, what a haven of rest is in these words—**THY KINGDOM COME!** Let us withdraw this morning from the multitude of our thoughts within us, into the sanctuary of God, and speak to one another of that kingdom, of which all the people of the Lord are subjects and citizens,—that kingdom which cannot be moved,—that throne which shall be established for ever in peace and truth and righteousness. Then, if we must again venture forth into the storm which is chafing without, if we must again mingle in spirit in the deadly fray, and scan the fatal lists of the fallen, it will be with a firmer heart and steadier sight—with deeper persuasion that the Lord reigneth, and clearer vision of that day, when those who are not lost but gone before, shall be joined to us in His presence.

THY KINGDOM COME. What do we know of His Kingdom? Nothing, that He has not told us. It is no mere Elysium of man's imagination. Though we believe that its perfection will surpass *all* imagination, we believe it because He has revealed it to us. And what has He revealed?

I will first direct your attention to these

simple words themselves—Thy Kingdom come. And I will remark on them this. They form one of the petitions of the prayer which our Lord gave to His disciples for all time, to use when they pray :—and by leaving it on record in the Gospels, He has associated it with every age of the Church militant. While we continue to pray, we shall say this. It is manifest then, that this Kingdom will not come during the period of prayer, and of conflict, and of the militant Church. When it has come, we shall cease to say “Thy kingdom come.” Then, another strain will be struck on the harps of the saints. Then the organs of our churches and the voices of our congregations will take up another song: “Hallelujah! for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of the Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever.”

So that it is clear, that this kingdom is something to follow upon, and not till after, the present state of trial and prayer. And thus the words cannot have a merely spiritual meaning. We cannot mean, when we say, “Thy kingdom come,”—“May sinners be converted to Thee more and more,”—because this is the spread of the Church militant in battering down the strongholds of Satan ;—but we mean “May that kingdom come, which when it has arrived will supersede the necessity of prayer and con-

flict, and be the fulfilment of thy glorious promises.”

Thus much is revealed in these words themselves; that the kingdom is an actual thing future, not a metaphorical thing present: a thing to be brought in, completed, as a new state, not any increase of gospel blessings in the present state. Well then, what do we know from Scripture of such a kingdom?—Before we come to direct testimony concerning it, we may observe that it was prefigured by the constitution of God’s people Israel under Himself as their king. They were a chosen people, and He dwelt in the midst of them, ruling them and upholding them. In the wilderness they foreshadowed the Church militant, journeying through the world, accompanied by the water of life and fed with the bread of life; and in the land of promise they foreshadowed the Church triumphant, when not one good thing of all that the Lord their God had spoken failed, but all came to pass¹. And when they had cast off the Lord their God as their king, and would have an earthly king like the nations about them, then again did God prefigure, by the kingdom which He constituted in Israel, His own more glorious kingdom hereafter. But these were only types and shadows, not to be recognized as such except by God’s own words, which set them up on high for sub-

¹ Josh. xxi. 45.

sequent ages to regard, and cause to fall upon them the hues of the distant sunrise of the latter days.

First of the direct prophetic witnesses for the kingdom of God, is David, himself a king. Frequent and plain are the announcements in his psalms to a future and glorious King, who should have “the heathen for his inheritance, and the utmost parts of the earth for his possession² :” who should also be “the Son of God³ :” of whom it is said, “Jehovah said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool⁴.” Frequently is earth called upon to rejoice, and all that is therein, at the approach of that kingdom⁵. Glowing and beautiful descriptions are given of its peace, its plenty, its righteousness⁶. But as yet, much of this is spoken as in a riddle, darkly. Unless subsequent events and scriptures had thrown back their light upon the psalms, we should hardly have discerned, in them alone, the rich glories of the kingdom which now shine from them. But if we pass on to the prophets, we come at once into light and clearness. Hardly one of them is there who does not plainly announce the future kingdom of God on earth. Take a few of the more notable instances : Isaiah, speaking of the child

² Ps. ii. 8.

³ Ib. ver. 7.

⁴ Ps. cx. 1.

⁵ See especially Ps. xcvi.—xcix.

⁶ See especially Ps. lxxxv. and lxxii.

who is to be born, the son given, unto us, says, "of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice, from henceforth even for ever⁷." And many are the glories which he enumerates as belonging to it: "the moon shall be confounded and the sun ashamed, when the Lord of Hosts shall reign in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem and before His ancients, gloriously⁸." Jeremiah writes: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a king shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is His name whereby He shall be called, JEHOVAH our RIGHTEOUSNESS⁹." Ezekiel speaks of the day when the dry bones shall be clothed with flesh, and all Israel shall be united into one kingdom, and one king shall be to them all¹. And Daniel even yet more plainly: in that wonderful prophecy of the history of the world, under the unfolding of which we are living at this day, having gone through the four great kingdoms which should be on this earth, and having seen the fourth of these kingdoms broken up, as we

⁷ Isa. ix. 7.

⁸ Isa. xxiv. 23.

⁹ Jer. xxiii. 5, 6.

¹ Ezek. xxxviii. 1 to end.

see it now, into separate and incoherent states, —he declares, “In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever².” And again in a subsequent vision: “These great beasts which are four, are four kings which shall arise out of the earth. But the saints of the most High shall take the kingdom and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever.” And afterwards: “The kingdom and dominion and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given unto the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him³.”

Thus far for Old Testament prophecy, which might, as every reader of his Bible knows, be followed through the lesser prophets to the same effect. It was in all probability these last-cited prophecies of Daniel to which our Lord’s Forerunner and our Lord Himself alluded, when they came preaching and saying “Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” That glorious kingdom, spoken of by the ancient prophets, was about to be brought in by the appearance in the flesh of Him who was its King. But throughout His ministry

² Dan. ii. 44.

³ Dan. vii. 27.

we ever find Him speaking of it as though present among men yet awaiting a completion in the future. He who said to the Jews, "Behold the kingdom of God is among you" (for so, and not "within" you, should the word be rendered) yet would not have it thought that the Kingdom of God was immediately to appear⁴. "Then," He says, speaking of the time of the end, "shall the righteous shine as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." And again He forewarns the unbelieving Jews, "Ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God⁵." "Ye are they," said He to His Apostles, "which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel⁶." And on that solemn occasion when He instituted the Sacrament of His Body and Blood, He declared to His disciples, "I will drink no more of this fruit of the vine, till I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom⁷:" or, as it is varied in another gospel, "till

⁴ Compare Luke xvii. 21, and xix. 11.

⁵ Luke xiii. 28, 29.

⁶ Luke xxii. 28—30.

⁷ Matt. xxvi. 29.

the kingdom of God shall come⁸." In the sublime description of the great day, where alone our Lord represents Himself as "the King⁹," He says to the righteous, "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world." As regards this subject, the opening of the Acts of the Apostles is remarkable, where, when it has been stated that the risen Saviour remained with His disciples forty days, "speaking to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God,"—immediately afterwards we find them asking Him, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" and in His reply He does not give any correction of the substance of their question, but only of their presumption in enquiring after "the times and seasons, which the Father has put in His own power:" from whence we may fairly infer, that the substance of His teaching to them had been concerning such a restoration, to take place in the Father's time.

We only want, to make our sketch of Scripture testimonies complete, one or two from the Apostles, to shew how they understood both the ancient prophets, and their divine Master Himself. St. Paul is clear on this point: he exhorts the Thessalonians "to walk worthy of God, who hath called us to His kingdom and

⁸ Luke xxii. 18.

⁹ Matt. xxv. 31 to end.

glory¹:" he charges Timothy to be faithful in his pastoral work "before the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and dead at His appearing and His kingdom²:" he speaks to the Corinthians of "the end, when Christ shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father³." St. James writes, "Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which He hath promised to them that love Him⁴?" And St. Peter, "So an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ⁵." Finally, in the prophetic book of Revelation, when the great enemy, the accuser of the brethren, is cast down, the saints of God are represented as crying, "Now is come salvation and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ⁶."

These Scripture testimonies, every portion of which might be very much multiplied, are sufficient to shew, that we are to look for a kingdom of Christ, not as a spiritual figure, but as a matter of fact to be accomplished in the future: a kingdom closely associated with His coming again to us: a kingdom wherein His saints shall reign with Him: a kingdom to be established over and in this earth of ours, wherein

¹ 1 Thess. ii. 12.

³ 1 Cor. xv. 24.

⁵ 2 Pet. i. 11.

² 2 Tim. iv. 1.

⁴ James ii. 5.

⁶ Rev. xii. 10.

it, being fully rescued from sin and the curse, will be completely subject to its rightful Lord and Redeemer. Thus much I believe is the plain sense of Scripture, simply and honestly understood: and I see not how we can receive the Bible at all, without receiving thus much. The words in which it is conveyed are too precise, too much woven in with matter of fact things, to be either explained away or figuratively taken. Further than this, I believe some important and interesting details may be inferred: but it is not safe to infer, without justifying the inference; and that might be far better done in a lecture on unfulfilled prophecy, than in the precious moments of our general pulpit teaching. I rest then here. We look for a kingdom—a kingdom whereof the King will be the Lord Jesus Christ in person: that kingdom is the subject of the earnest longings, the prayers, the tears of the child of God: and it is of that kingdom that our Lord has taught us to say, *THY KINGDOM COME*.

Let us now trace a few of its characteristics, and use them to reflect light on what ought to be the character of those who daily say these words.

First of all—and most important for us who live in these days—for us who are involved in the calamities and strong temptations of war—for us, who are about this morning to meet at that board where the guests are in charity with

all men,—it is a kingdom of PEACE and love. “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain⁷.” “Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more⁸.” O may we, dear fellow countrymen, when we daily say the Lord’s Prayer, never allow ourselves to forget that we pray for peace ! However long it may please God in His mysterious Providence to involve us in war, may we never learn to look on war as a good or natural state for a Christian nation to be in:—may we never love combat for combat’s sake, nor shed blood when blood might be spared. Remember that nothing but the sternest necessity can justify a state of warfare. We believe that necessity to be present now: but never let its presence obliterate from our hearts and consciences that we are the soldiers and servants of the Prince of Peace. I said, on our day of humiliation, that I feared this might be so; that one of the unavoidable evils of war was, that it seared the conscience even of the high-principled, and brought in bitterness of feeling, and insatiableness of revenge, and a banishing, for the time, of Christian motives and words and acts. I little knew then, how far that temptation would be carried; how long and severe our trial would be,—what need there would be for the Christian minister again to lift

⁷ Isa. xi. 9.

⁸ Isa. ii. 4.

up his warning voice, lest we should be beguiled from the simplicity that is in Christ. To endure manfully the present hardness and anxiety, to press on with vigour our preparations, to aid with all our energy, as every man can, I deeply feel to be our duty, nay to be absolutely necessary for the recovering of a firm and lasting peace: but O it is not our duty, and never can be, to speak uncharitable words, to let loose bitter passions, or to hate our fellow creatures at all. We look for—we pray for—a kingdom of peace. We follow Him who said, “Blessed are the peacemakers.” Let us be found partakers of His Spirit: deploring, rather than rejoicing at, the necessity which involves us in hostility to any, and praying Him in His mercy to open for us a way, by which it may be speedily and safely terminated. And not only so—but let us have peace among ourselves: neighbour with neighbour, citizen with citizen, cultivating amity and courtesy, and gentle feelings: not betrayed into animosity by the necessary rivalries of the free constitution under which we live, but in honour preferring one another, and as much as lieth in us living peaceably with all men. Thus will our daily prayer, for the kingdom of peace to come, find an echo in our daily conduct.

Again, it is a Kingdom of PURITY. Only “the pure in heart shall see God.” And if we search deeper for this purity of heart, we shall find

that it can spring but from one source—the new birth by the Holy Spirit. “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God⁹.” When we pray daily “Thy kingdom come,” are we giving diligence to make our calling and election sure? Are we under the influence of that Holy Spirit? or are we living as children of the world, impure in thought, unholy in life—with no love for things which are lovely and of good report? If so, how can we pray with any effect for that kingdom to come?

And again, it is a kingdom, whose very glory and chief attribute it is, that CHRIST IS PRESENT AND RULING IN IT. Do you, brethren, wish for it to come? Then will Christ be ever present, and ruling in your hearts. Otherwise, what fulfilment of your desire could be the coming of a kingdom, which brought with it a Saviour whom you cared not for, who was not an object of your love,—the mention of whom woke no earnest sympathies in your breast? None will rest under the peaceful shadow of that kingdom, who have not loved, and sought after, and served, and imitated Christ, in this present life. The very secret of its peace and love is, that all hearts will be knit together in Him. The very secret of its purity will be, that His Spirit will reign entirely and uninterruptedly in every character. And both these things, love

⁹ John iii. 3.

to Him, and participation of His Spirit, are to be gained first here, not there: belong to the conflicts of the state of grace, and wait only their perfection in the kingdom of glory.

Again, it is a kingdom of joy. Even the words of Scripture are but feeble, to convey the fulness of the Spirit in describing its joy. What we know here of joy, is but fragmentary,—is but a beautiful outpost in an enemy's country, where the Christian soldier must be ever on his watch lest the foe should steal upon him: is mingled with disappointment and temptation, and touches hard upon the confines of sin. But O who can tell the joy of that kingdom of Christ? When all temptation is over, all sin banished, all labour done,—to enter into final rest—the soul in perfect peace, perfect security—not a cloud, nor a chance of a cloud, in the clear blue of its heaven,—not a foe remaining to trouble it! Then first, it seems to me, shall we roll off the great burden of life, and really live: for life is joy, and then first joy will be full. And when men ask what the body will be in the resurrection state,—*which* part of our life here it will represent,—I would send them hither for an answer. What will the wonderful countenance of man be,—that blotted page wherein we now read the struggles of the soul,—with none of the scars of passion, none of the records of suffering, none of the footprints of time? When joy, purer than the

joys of childhood, shall sparkle in the eye, and love, deeper than earth ever knew, shall look out from its transparent chambers; when peace shall harmonize all the features, and holiness clothe them with dignity, and humility temper them with grace? And all this shall be, when it is said, "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord;" "We shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is." Yes, brethren, the kingdom for which we look is a kingdom of joy; and those who pray for its coming, hope and yearn for the blessedness of its approach. The joy of their hearts is not here, but hidden with Christ, and waiting its manifestation with Him.

So that, finally, this Kingdom is to us now a Kingdom of HOPE, and we are prisoners of hope—and all who really pray for it, hope for it. "Looking," says St. Paul to Titus, "for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ¹." While we pray then, be we in earnest to stir up and keep alive our hope of His coming. Every season of Advent finds us nearer the appointed day. He has not forgotten His promise; and He may be near, when we least think it. Surely we have to reproach ourselves with coldness on this point. We pray,

¹ Titus ii. 13.

“Thy Kingdom come:” and how often do we hope for, how much do we desire, that Kingdom?

May these words of the Apostle abide on our hearts this day, and be present in our thoughts when we use this prayer: “our home is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself².”

² Phil. iii. 20, 21.

SERMON XVII.

SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

1854.

JOHN xv. 2.

“ Every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.”

It is the privilege, as well as the duty of the Christian, to see God in every thing. The circumstances in which he is placed, public or private, he refers to the appointment of his Heavenly Father. And such a view does not fetter either his choice before acting, or his judgment after the event. Our deeds, viewed from their earthly side, are the result of human will. Speaking as men, calamities may be in great part provided against, prosperous issues rendered probable, courses of action adopted or refrained from: but speaking as Christians. every calamity, when it has occurred, every success when attained, is God's doing: every acceptance or rejection of a course of action

formed part of the plan of His mysterious providence. We may call this inconsistency, if we will ; but it is an inconsistency inherent in our imperfect nature. It is an inconsistency unavoidable by all who study plain matter of fact. That our will is free, the mere utterance of the assertion proves : that God orders all things, the very idea of a God involves in itself. The man of sound mind and sober piety holds the two together : the free will of man, and the sovereignty of God. It is by attempting to reconcile the two, that unsoundness and want of sobriety are shewn. There lies between them a gulf, which no human faculty can ever bridge over. The Christian then, while he believes to the utmost in man's responsibility, and reserves to himself the right to judge of the actions of others, and counsels for the best under all doubtful circumstances, yet looks on the course of this world, which is made up of human acts, and circumstances moulded by human counsels, as ordered by the governance of God. In it, His hand is to him ever visible. If it is peaceable and prosperous, he offers God the praise ; if stormy and afflictive, he adores God in humility, strives to ascertain the reason of His chastisement, and to order himself so, as to profit by it.

It must be obvious to you all, to what these remarks are tending. On the circumstances in which we are now nationally placed, I would,

humanly speaking, leave all free to form their unfettered judgment. That such judgment has been very variously formed, is evident; and it will no doubt be your lot and mine, before many days have passed, to read and hear sufficient proofs that such has been the case¹. And I say what I have said for this reason; that no divergent opinions of statesmen, no judgments of approval or disapproval of human conduct, may stir our minds from our Christian position: and that on the other side, those who see and adore God's hand in what has befallen us, may not feel themselves in any way restricted in their judgment on human agents thereby. For that which we ascribe to God as His doing, the faithful and diligent human agent may yet have due and subordinate praise: to him who said "Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds," it was yet answered, "Well, thou good servant²." And for that to which we submit as the act of the divine Hand, the unfaithful and unprincipled human agent may yet incur deserved blame. Of Him, who was "delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God," it was said to the Jews, "Whom ye by the hands of the wicked have crucified and slain³."

With such thoughts as these, let us enter on the consideration of our text. Our Lord is

¹ This sermon was preached two days before the meeting of Parliament.

² Luke xviii. 16.

³ Acts ii. 23 (Greek).

speaking of Himself as the true vine; His Heavenly Father as the husbandman; and His disciples as the branches. He evidently regards Himself as including, in the largest sense, all His people,—as the vine is composed of the trunk and the branches. And of this His mystical Body, the character of the branches is various. Some bear no fruit: others are more or less fruitful. “Every branch,” He says, “in me that beareth not fruit, my Father taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.”

Of course the main and direct application of such a parable is to individual Christians, to whom indeed it was spoken. They are received into the Church of Christ by the ordinance of baptism. By virtue of that inclusion, in the largest and widest sense, in Christ, they become members of His body—branches of the vine. But as there are fruitful and unfruitful branches, profitable and unprofitable members, so there are faithful and unfaithful baptized persons; those who adorn, and those who dishonour, their holy calling. Of these latter it is said, that the great Husbandman taketh them away. Though accounted branches now, and in some sense partaking of the root and fatness of the vine, they shall not retain that place, when the Husbandman comes to prove the tree, but shall be cast forth, as branches are, and withered, and gathered into the fire to be burned. In that great

day, to which our gospel just now directed our attention, all ungodly persons, all hypocrites, all mere outward professors of religion, all the selfish and uncharitable and unforgiving, shall be cast out of the visible Church, and none but the servants of God retained—none but the members in vital union with the Head—none but the fruit-bearing branches. And it is to the treatment and discipline of these latter, that our text especially applies. “Every branch that beareth fruit, He,” the great Husbandman, “purgeth,” or “pruneth,” “that it may bring forth more fruit.” The branch bears fruit by virtue of the healthy and generous sap which flows into it from the vine. Without union with the vine, it were not a living branch at all: without this fertilizing sap flowing, and flowing rightly, and in proper measure, through it, it could bring forth no fruit. But as, in the operations of husbandry, the sap requires directing, the branch must be trained and pruned, and stopped from rambling out into unfruitful exuberance, so it is with God’s spiritual husbandry likewise. The fruit-bearing branches of Christ are liable to become exuberant and unprofitable—to cover a vast space without a correspondent yield for the Master’s use. And so they need pruning—their exuberance must be lopped off, their course and habit of growth regulated, that the nourishment supplied to them from the spiritual vine may be turned to the best account.

Hence, beloved, come our trials, our sicknesses, our bereavements, our disappointments, our painful changes of plan, our hopes deferred: hence it is that so many of the Lord's servants are entering into life halt and maimed: passing years of sleepless anxiety, or of passive suffering: tenants of the darkened chamber, or presiding over the widowed household, or seeking to recall the tones of a voice long silent, and features over which the mists of oblivion are gathering. All these, and all other afflictions of believers, are but the knife of the great Husbandman, the purging that they may bring forth more fruit—the training aside and downward that the sap may flow aright, and no drop of the Spirit's fountain of life be wasted.

I did not, however, intend to-day to dwell mainly on our individual Christian experience. The afflicted we have always with us; and the language of exhortation to them will never be dropped in vain among a congregation. But it is not often that a nation's heart is stirred; not often that all eyes are turned to one point, all ears attentive for one sound mostly or alone. At such a time would we enter through the opened avenues of deeper feeling,—touch the door not often unclosed to us, and commune with the inner hearts of all, each in its secret presence chamber. And it seems to me that such a test as this well describes, and most instructively sets before us, the meaning of God's

present dealing with us as a people. The same parable which describes individuals, describes nations. If Christian believers are the smaller twigs of the great vine, each in Christ and Christ in them, each united to the parent stock by the very principle of life, and to the world without by the curling and grasping tendril of affection,—each fertilized by the flowing sap of the Spirit, and bearing its larger or smaller bunch of fruit for the Master's use, we may extend the same similitude further, and regard the lesser branches as Christian *families*;—and by the same analogy, the greater limbs of the vine may figure forth to us Christian *nations*, including families, as they include individuals, but existing, and bearing fruit, by the same power, and under the same conditions. Such a limb of the vine, my fellow countrymen, are we: a branch bearing fruit. Some such branches has the great Husbandman taken away. Where are the churches of Africa? Where those seven of Asia, addressed by the Spirit in the opening of the apocalyptic vision? Where hundreds of Christian communities, who once had a name to live, but were dead? Praised be His mercy, He has not removed us from the vine. No, not even when we were withered and almost fruitless, corrupted and cankered. Then, by His mysterious husbandry, He purged us, that we might bring forth more fruit: He brought about a Reformation which looked like

a destruction ; He dug about us, and fertilized our soil, and proved us by fire and the knife ; He diverted us from our own ways, and turned us into His ways ; He raised up our reformers, and gave our Church kings for its nursing fathers and queens for its nursing mothers, and made the wrath of man to praise Him. And then when we put forth fruit in our purer ritual and our scriptural liturgy, but were again disposed to luxuriate in spiritual pomp and pride, to forget the claims of the conscience which we had ourselves set up, and carry on that persecution from which we had but just escaped,—again did the heavenly Husbandman interfere, and purge us that we might bring forth more fruit. Our throne was overturned, our king slain, our pastors silenced, our land filled with blood ; and yet this was not the doing of our enemy, but of the great Dresser of the vine ; and after not one stroke of His knife, but many,—after not one turning and forming of the branch, but many,—by His own pruning dispensations of civil war, and internal revolution, and subsequent dissensions both beyond and within the limits of law, He brought us to establish on firm foundation the great principle of the freedom of men's consciences before Him ; He provided for the large and unrestricted flow of the vital sap of the Spirit through the whole community—that each man in his own life's earnestness, and his own place in society, may

be joined to the vine and partake of the vital sap. And before passing on further, what has been the issue of the pruning of our heavenly Vinedresser? Have we not all seen, that for every stroke of His knife we have brought forth more fruit? Has it not uniformly been proved, that His breaking down our barriers has been a surer defence for us, than was ever our building them up? Have we not found, that when we cried out "Spare that branch, or the Church is gone," and He in His wisdom lopped it away, the result has ever been more real fruitfulness, more Christian love, more living in the Spirit, more effect on the ungodly, more power for good? Look at all our dissensions between ourselves. For ages have alarmists been running to and fro among us, crying out that religion would be ruined, that Church authority would be at an end, that we should be overflowed with ignorance and the ambition of designing men. But meantime, truth was being tested, and error and selfishness and worldliness held up to shame; we learned to call one another Christians and brethren; the leaven was penetrating; zeal was kindled, charity was brightened, faith was confirmed. And what has now been the issue—now, that every barrier is broken down, and every man's conscience left unfettered? What if ecclesiastical censures are rendered powerless? What if the age of pains and penalties is for ever gone

by? Do we not thankfully see rising up, gradually and surely, because it is of God, a barrier far more powerful than them all,—an influence to which even the ungodly must bend for fear—the religious public opinion of a believing Christian nation? Do we not begin to discern, in the effects of His thus dealing with us, the first streaks of the dawn of that day, when only the voice of the people shall be indeed the voice of God, because it shall be the voice of a people of Christian believers, dwelt in and actuated by God's own Spirit? Nor is this the only fruit. Look for an instant at the birth and growth of our religious and charitable societies; our myriad institutions for alleviating suffering, and instructing ignorance, and spreading the Gospel of Christ. Tardy indeed, and scanty fruit in too many instances; but still fruit, and owing in great part to the noble and Christian rivalry of sects and denominations, and of the various forms of opinion within our own Church; fruit in short brought forth in consequence of His own pruning,—by His doing for us, and with us, that which we should never of choice have done for or with ourselves.

And now let us pass onward. Again, the heavenly Husbandman is visiting our branch of the vine. Again, He is purging us, that we may bring forth more fruit. And surely, we needed it. Placed in a world of vicissitudes, and sorrows, and disappointments, our national

position seemed to secure us comparative immunity from all. Our mountain seemed to be so strong that it would never be moved. A long period of peace had settled us as it were on our lees. We reposed on the existing security. We laid our plans, fearless for the future. The graver things of life were becoming with us very much a matter of course. And our religion was sharing the same paralyzing influence. In our early days, men of God had struggled against the low standard of doctrine in the Church. Better light had by their means, under Him, been diffused. But their watchwords had become, with us their successors, phrases commonly current—and terms which once roused hundreds to contend for the truth, dropped powerless from the lips of many in whom there was neither truth nor zeal. Religion and worldliness were getting far too closely allied. Families living in costly splendour were practising romantic self-denials, which touched all parts of the spiritual being but the right one. On the tables of notorious worldly livers were seen the faithful testimonies of godly men against them, read, and praised, and unapplied. These were straws on the surface, serving to shew the current. But they were symptoms which carried sadness to many a Christian mind. If all this was to remain so, our religion would some day lose its power for good. We should be merely silvering and gilding the

image of the faith: and to what purpose was it to have conformed our doctrine to Scripture, if that doctrine was to have no influence—if we were only to have an emblazoned Bible to gaze at, not a worn Bible to mark and learn and inwardly digest? Then again, the springs of our charity were becoming sadly dried. It might be perhaps small reproach (but still it is one) that under the pressure of the present moment, almost every religious and charitable institution is languishing for want of funds; but let it never be forgotten, that this was so, long before war was upon us, or even anticipated: in the midst of unexampled public and private prosperity. The yearly subscription was perfunctorily given, or carelessly withdrawn, without much enquiry whither it went, without *any* desire to track it to its work of good: we were doing only the next better thing than burying the talent in a napkin,—putting it out to the usurers, instead of trading with it ourselves, with our energies and hearts and hopes.

And now He is purifying us that we may bring forth more fruit. All this matter of course work is at an end. Human life, in all its uncertainties and disappointments and miseries, is present in stern reality among us. “Be still and know that I am God,” is His voice to us all. Whatever men may have done, or might not have done,—He has done, and is

doing this: pruning the exuberant branches of our pride, turning us whither we would not, providing for the life-giving sap of His Spirit to flow into and among us more freely and more fruitfully than ever it did before. Already, I hope, we begin to see this. Some points have been gained by our trials even now, long before we know whether they are even approaching their termination. Never again, we may hope, will the ideas of a profane man and a soldier be associated in our minds. In future we may trust there will be less temptation for our young men, on entering our army, to cast off the guide of their childhood, to be ashamed of their Bible as a companion, to assume the language or the habits of those who know not God. A volume of extracts from letters and accounts which have been and which remain to be disclosed, from those who are daily facing death, or have met it in the field, might serve to put all such conduct to shame, and to arm them against such temptation. Never again, may we hope, will it be supposed by any professing religion among us, that the weaker sex are weak also in ministrations of mercy, or that they are not bound, in whatever rank they may be placed, to engage personally in such ministrations. The fastidiousness of the proud, and the indolence of the luxurious, and I may add, the unchristian exclusiveness of the religious bigot, have received a rebuke whose effect I

would fain hope will not end with the glow of shame on the cheek. And I cannot but think that the way is being paved for much more cordial cooperation in good of the various ranks in our country, by the clear evidence which has been afforded that the higher, and the highest, among us, do not scruple to sacrifice health and life for the community—that on this point at least the lips of the disaffected will be forever sealed, and the interested agitation of the low and selfish henceforth meet with deserved contempt. I might go further, and ask you to look in with me on many a bereaved family to whom first the voice of the divine Spirit has spoken in that bereavement: to many a heart now prostrate under God's afflicting hand, which when the storm is over shall spring up quickened into new life, and shall spend on the Lord and His work those affections and those services whose earthly object is now with Him. For though these are individual effects, yet the aggregate of them is the effect on the nation,—the pruning of our national branch of the Body of Christ. And I might point to the fact, that the springs of charity and kindness are gushing forth anew; that many a heart is moved, and many a hand busy, in works of love for those who have gone out from us, and those whom they have left behind. All this is hopeful; and if God has given us these hardly questionable signs of His gracious purposes already, I can-

not doubt that as we are led onward through our trial, He will open them to us more and more; and shew us, that if He is now pruning us with the knife of affliction, it is, that we may indeed bring forth more fruit to His glory.

Well then, dear friends, let us be watchful; not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is; not surprised nor cast down, because we receive evil at His hand as well as good, but examining our fruit, and enquiring what the heavenly Husbandman expects of us, and sparing neither ourselves nor our substance, —nor diligence in seeking His grace, that we may shew ourselves mindful of His great mercies, and fulfil the end of His present chastisement.

And as I before reminded you that the effect on the nation is made up of the effects produced on individuals, so let this be the impression conveyed home in each of our minds,—that our heavenly Father is purifying each one of us by this trial, that we may bring forth more fruit to Him. Let each look to his own ways, and increase his own usefulness, and lay himself out more for God's service. From Him is our fruit formed; in order to be more fruitful, we must live closer to Him, commune with Him more in prayer, seek Him more in His ordinances, live more under the teaching of His

Spirit. “Herein is our Father glorified, that we bear much fruit.” This is the purpose for which He has watched over us and kept us hitherto, and exalted us as a people; this is the purpose for which He is now visiting us: O let not this His purpose be in vain.

SERMON XVIII.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

1854.

JOHN i. 23.

“He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness,
Make straight the way of the Lord.”

THE Church directs our attention, during these two last Sundays in Advent, to the course, and testimony, of the Forerunner of our Lord. It is a subject full of interest and instruction; and one not perhaps often dwelt on.

Let us first take a historical survey of the circumstances. When now the fulness of the time was come for God to send forth His Son, He raised up from the same family another child, not born after the ordinary manner of men, announced like Christ Himself by an angelic vision, and ushered into the world with sign and prophecy. All that concerned this child was strange and full of meaning. His parents belonged to the priesthood; they had been blameless in the observance of the com-

mandments and ordinances of the Lord. The child was to be a Nazarite unto God from the womb. Of his infancy and youth we only hear, that he grew and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel¹. Thither let us try and follow him. We do not, perhaps, often enough accustom our imagination to fill up the gaps of the Scripture narrative, and to give life and consistency to the record.

The lesson of faith which his father Zacharias had been taught, the prophecy which he had uttered at the nursing of the child, doubtless were not lost upon John. He grew up conscious of an unusual destiny. He was to be the prophet of the Highest. He was to go before the face of Jehovah, to prepare His ways. From the first he was not as other children are. He was in the deserts. The society, the games, the clothing of his equals, had no attractions for him. Full of his high mission, he wandered, in strange and scanty garb, in the rocky ravines of the wilderness of Judah, or among the thickets that fringe the Jordan. There, amidst scenes full of the power of Israel's God, was his youthful spirit trained. Sometimes he gazed on that still lake of death, which yet bore tokens of God's swift judgment against the sinners of old: sometimes he may have visited the birth-place of the Law, and stood in the caves of

¹ Luke i. 80.

Horeb, and communed with God in the solitudes of Sinai: sometimes he may have forded the ancient river of Kishon, and climbed to the top of Carmel, and there have sat, and drunk the spirit and gathered the power of Elias. And we may conceive that, when he met with those who travelled by the way, he uttered to them strange words, and warnings too grave for youth, and spoke of righteousness and temperance and judgment to come. They found him on the rocks with the prophet Esaias opened before him, or heard his clear voice trying the note of preparation which was hereafter to awaken Israel:—and perhaps for long years the wild boy of the desert had been a sign and a wonder to many.

But at the time appointed,—when now thirty years had past while that mighty spirit had been growing to ripeness in solitude,—the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. Now all his scattered purposes were gathered into one. His mission was given him. His anticipations of the coming Redeemer received definiteness and power. And now first the passers by at the ford of the Jordan heard a voice crying “Repent; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Now first, one heart and another is softened by the call, and daily growing numbers confess their sins and are baptized. By and by the whole country is stirred. The heart of the people, always sounder

than the heart of their spiritual rulers, turns to the Lord their God. "There went out unto him Jerusalem and all Judæa, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins²." To all these he spoke of One mightier than himself, who, though in time coming after him, was in dignity preferred before him: whose shoe's latchet he was not worthy to unloose: who should baptize them with the Holy Ghost and with fire. At last Jesus Himself came to be baptized. Related to the Baptist according to the flesh, He was personally known to him: nay we can hardly believe but that the testimonies concerning the holy Child, spoken long years ago, and His own witness borne at twelve years old in the temple, must have been heard of by John: and indeed that he knew so much of Him and His office, as to look on Him as the consolation of Israel, the Deliverer of God's people. But we have it from his own lips, that he did not yet know Him as Jehovah, before whom he himself was to go to prepare His ways; not yet as the subject of his own prophecy, who was to baptize with the Holy Ghost and with fire. By a special sign from heaven, this is made known to him. As Jesus comes up out of the water, the Spirit of God, in bodily form, in the shape of a dove, is seen

² Matt. iv. 5, 6.

descending through the air and abiding on Him : and the Almighty Father is heard proclaiming from above, " This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." From that time, John bears witness unto Jesus. When the Scribes and Pharisees sent messengers to him to demand his office and authority, he told them of one who stood among them whom they knew not³. When in company with two of his disciples, he saw Jesus coming to him, he exclaimed, " Behold the Lamb of God⁴ !" When afterwards other of his disciples came to him to announce the spread of the influence and power of Christ, he testified of Him as the Bridegroom, having the bride, and of himself merely as a friend, standing and rejoicing because of the bridegroom's voice. " He must increase," he cried, " but I must decrease."

Through the various stages of that decrease it is not my purpose to follow him to-day. We have already gone over ground sufficient, from which to cull instruction for ourselves.

I do not think we often question respecting this course and testimony of Christ's forerunner, WHEREUNTO SERVED IT ? We know that by it the Jewish people as a whole *were not* prepared to receive Jesus as their Saviour : for they rejected and crucified Him. And if it be alleged that they who rejected and crucified

³ John i. 26.

⁴ John i. 29. 36.

Him, were the Scribes and Pharisees, who also rejected the baptism of John, the answer to this is, that the people themselves gave their voices for His crucifixion—that His course had disappointed and irritated them, as well as their rulers; or they would not have listened to these last more than to Him. Still, even in this matter, I cannot doubt that much was done by the testimony of John. At the very last, when the enmity of the Scribes and Pharisees was at its highest, we find they dared not insinuate that the baptism of John was not from heaven but of men,—because all the people held John for a prophet. Now what a vast advantage must it have given the early preachers of the gospel, to have had to do with a people who held John for a prophet! For John's testimony to Jesus was matter of notoriety. Our Lord appeals to it, in the face of the Jews themselves. How easy, to lead on any candid mind from belief in John to belief in Jesus. And consequently we find, when the Church assembled to fill up the place of the traitor Judas, St. Peter specifying ⁵ as the qualification of a candidate for the Apostleship, that he must have companied with them all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among them, “beginning from the baptism of John.” Again, in the only detailed sermon of St. Paul to Jews in

⁵ Acts i. 22.

their synagogue, we have him distinctly⁶ appealing to the testimony of John among the proofs of the Messiahship of our Lord.

And if John thus prepared the way by witnessing to Jesus in person, I cannot doubt that he also prepared many of the children of Israel in spirit to receive the message of life by Him. It was a dreary time with Israel when Christ came. The old theocracy was over: the sceptre had departed from Judah, and the lawgiver from between his feet. The service of God was for the most part entrusted to a set of barren formalists. All was flat and stagnant. We know indeed that there were some who waited for the consolation of Israel; but they probably, like Simeon and Anna, like Zacharias and Elisabeth, were among the aged—belonged rather to the last age than this: were few and far between, and out of fashion and repute. In such an age of worldliness and hypocrisy, to hear “there is a prophet among us,” to see once more the garb of Elias in the desert—to hear once more that voice, clear as when it rung among the cliffs of Carmel, “How long halt ye between two opinions?” O it must have gone into the depths of many a heart in Israel, and called up again the almost forgotten presence of Israel’s covenant God! And then, when they stood and listened to the wonderful

⁶ Acts xiii. 24, 25.

messenger of repentance, how the words of their old prophets, long wrapped in the napkin of formalism, and heard muffled through the drawl of the Scribe in the synagogue, must have leapt out into life, and gone right to the ear of their hearts! When they who, like some of our modern rationalists, saw no more in Isaiah than the herald of the return from Babylon, heard once more the voice of him that cried in the wilderness "Prepare ye in the desert a highway for our God"—heard that "every valley should be exalted and every mountain and hill made low: and the crooked straight and the rough places plain, and that all flesh should see the salvation of our God,"—I cannot doubt that many a book of the law and prophets was unrolled which had long lain in the dust, and that some noble spirits among the Jews, as among the Berœans afterwards, began to search the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so. And no more can I doubt, that the result was the same; and that therefore many among them believed⁷.

And again when, confessing their sins, they were baptized of John in Jordan, must we not believe that many at least of those thousands who received the outward rite, became deeply humbled within? that many reeds were bruised, whom the Redeemer came not to break but to

⁷ Acts xvii. 12.

heal? And if John was made the discloser of pain that he could not assuage, the discoverer of burdens which he could not remove, for whom was this a preparation, but for Him who cried, "Come unto me all that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest?"

Hence doubtless arose that remarkable gathering of publicans and sinners round our Lord and His teaching, which we notice so often in the Gospel. We know that the publicans were baptized of him; and we have his exhortation to them given by St. Luke⁸. Many an unprincipled exactor, many a profligate, was thus turned from the error of his ways and brought to Him who came to heal the broken-hearted; and perhaps we owe some of the most touching scenes in our Lord's ministry to the previous preparation, by means of John, of the hearts of men and women who had been sinners.

So that I must believe as matter of history, though our Lord was rejected by the Jewish people as well as by their rulers, yet that the baptism and preaching of John prepared many hearts for Him, which afterwards leaned on Him in the fulness of faith, and now are with Him where He is. As matter of fact, remember, some of His Apostles, and as matter of

⁸ Chap. iv. 12, 13.

probability all of the Twelve, were first disciples of John.

But we must not omit one purpose of God in raising up this remarkable forerunner to go before our Lord. He came "in the way of righteousness." He was to the Scribes and Pharisees just one whom, if they had been men in earnest at all, they would have hailed with eagerness and believed without hesitation. He was full of the Old Testament spirit. His parents were blameless in the fulfilment of the law. All that could unite to recommend John and his office to a pious Jew, was united. His ascetic character—his stern morality—his utterance of his message in the well-known words of their Prophets—all this was exactly of a kind to please Jewish feelings and conciliate Jewish prejudices. And consequently we find that some among the Scribes and Pharisees did come to his baptism. But the majority rejected him. For we read on one occasion "all the people that heard Jesus, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, not being baptized of him⁹." And thus, even before Jesus of Nazareth was manifested, or their peculiar hatred to Him had begun, it was

⁹ Luke vii. 29, 30.

judicially shewn that when God called, they would not hear; that the heart of this people was waxed gross, and their ears were dull of hearing, and their eyes had they closed; thus was additional evidence given to the fact, that the rejection of Jesus by His own, was not merely for any hostility that His own character and course excited in them, still less on account of His falling short of the announcements of their prophets, but because they were hardened in heart against God, and indisposed to turn to Him at all.

But I must also believe, that the mission of our Lord's Forerunner had purposes reaching far beyond any thing, which, as matter of history or surmise, his course may then have accomplished. All that concerns Christ's coming on earth, has deep scriptural meaning. That He came unknown and humble in station, that He went about doing good, that He was meek and lowly of heart, that He prayed for his murderers, all these things regard not only his own immediate work of redemption, but also our instruction. And so of every miracle He wrought. Each had not only its own gracious end of mercy at the time, but also its end of mercy which will be all the world's lifetime in fulfilling, even the shewing to us who come after, the Person and office of our Redeemer in all its manifold fulness and richness, and sufficiency for the needs of our humanity.

And so was it also with the mission and career of John the Baptist. First, as to the place of his ministry. He came, a voice in the wilderness: a solitary preacher in the vast and trackless desert. One passer by and another caught the sound of his words, and went his way, and told his neighbour, long before those crowds of which we have spoken gathered about him. And so does God ever send his messengers to prepare his way before Him. When Christ would come to an individual or to a family or to a nation, He sends before Him these voices crying in the wilderness. Few hear them; fewer heed them. God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not. How often does conscience testify in the heart unheeded—how often is a man warned by God's judgments—how often does the voice of affliction speak to a family—how often do the ministers of Christ cry aloud to a nation, without effect! And then at last perhaps the warning voice is heard—heard as in passing, but it sinks deep—it gathers round it more and more of the thoughts and interests and feelings, and the way of the Lord begins to be prepared: but it must still be as it were in the wilderness,—the process goes on in silence and in the depths of the heart; repentance, and sorrow for sin, and turning to God, are not matters at first mixed up with our daily lives, but cherished in our closets; he who finds the treasure, goes his

way and hides it. And the ministry of preparation for the Lord is ever stern, and unyielding, and unsocial in its nature; going down into men's individual characters, and prescribing courses of duty,—pointing onward, it is true, to the Redeemer, but not yet calling men to partake of the glorious liberty of the sons of God. He who is preparing for Christ to dwell in his heart, who is in process of conversion to God, is greater than any born of woman—than any mere natural man; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

But when Christ appeared, how all was altered! John came neither eating nor drinking. He avoided the haunts of men and dwelt in the deserts. But the Son of man came eating and drinking. He was found where men assembled. He was the friend of publicans and sinners. No longer in the desert, but in the crowded streets of Jerusalem, at the marriage of Cana, in the houses of Pharisees and disciples, in the courts of the temple, among buyers and sellers, on land and at sea, was the teaching and ministry of Jesus carried on. We hear only of the *testimony* of John; but ever of the *works* of Christ. He came to penetrate, to bless, to cheer, to hallow, the whole daily life of men. And here is our lesson too; that when Christ is really come to us,—when our preparation in solitude, pointing on to Christ, is over, and our life of faith in Him begun,—we

must not be voices in the wilderness any longer ; must not stop with John's baptism, but go on to the spiritual life in Christ ; in other words, that our religion was not given us for our closets, or to withdraw us from busy life, but to go with us into life, and hallow life's work, and regulate social intercourse, and make us a blessing wherever we are. Before, God bore testimony within us to prepare us for Him : now, His Holy Ghost works within us to bring forth fruit to His praise, that men may see it and glorify Him. Thus the whole spirit of the Gospel is distinctly anti-ascetic. The Christian who withdraws from the world to serve Christ, is not mounting to a higher degree of sanctity, but going back a step in his spiritual standing, and shrinking from that life of holiness which Christ came to enable him to lead.

But again, the *character* of the Baptist's message has a voice and meaning for us. "Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill made low : and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain : and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together." Yes, brethren, before this glorious revelation shall be made, this levelling process must take place, both amongst mankind, and within ourselves. In our own hearts, those mountains of pride must be laid low which we have raised for ourselves, those low places must be filled

up where we love to cleave to the dust in grovelling and worldly thoughts: the crookedness of our ways, half with God, and half with the world and self, must be made straight, and the rough unevenness of inconsistent conduct made plain, before Christ can really have His throne in our hearts, dwelling and reigning there by His blessed Spirit.

And among mankind also the same preparation of His way is required. The various ranks and orders of society are indeed His appointment, and between them there is necessarily a barrier interposed by the order of His Providence. But *we* may make that barrier an absolute one. The wealthy may add pride to his wealth; the high born, haughtiness and exclusiveness to his rank; the general Christian brotherhood of mankind may be repudiated; and thus two distinct races may be found in the Church, the rich, and the poor, living together without any sympathy and without any fellow-feeling for each other. And before Christ can really come in vital power to a people, these things must be altered; the valleys must be exalted—the degraded taken up out of the mire, and shewn their Christian liberty and high calling,—and the self-exalted humbled, by dismissing their high thoughts of themselves, and taking earnest part in works of self-denying love.

One more lesson from the Baptist's course

seems to be set before us. "He must increase, but I must decrease¹." All that merely leads on to, all that stops short of Christ Himself, shall wane and fade; while He shall shine on ever more and more glorious. All ordinances, all preaching, all mere repentance and observance, shall, as time passes on, in the Christian's life, and in the great world, lose their value, and be seen to be worthless in comparison with Him; while to the believer, and to His believing Church, He Himself shall ever become more precious, more glorious, more lovely. When the voices of all His forerunners are silent—when all the means of grace have given place to the fruition of glory,—when His written word is superseded by being for ever with Him, then His name and His praise shall possess the entire hearts of all His redeemed people, reigning supreme.

Well then, dear brethren, let us prepare for His coming. Let us hear in the solitude of our hearts, and meditate on in the solitude of our closets, those warning voices which call us all to repentance; examining ourselves and trying ourselves; laying the axe to the root of the tree; purifying out our chaff by the aid of His Spirit; and then from the reality of our solitary religion, let us not fail to pass onward to the realization of it in our daily and social

¹ John iii. 30.

lives—not ashamed of the cross of Christ, but testifying to Him, and being like Him, and going about doing good as He did. Let us ever be cooler in our affection and looser in our attachment to things on earth, and ever warmer in love and more strictly bound to Him, as the chief desire of our souls.

For who can tell, how soon all preparation may be over, all Advent seasons at an end, and He may come to us, or we be called to Him? Blessed will those be in that day, who have listened to the solitary cry of His Forerunner, and made straight His ways within them, and glorified Him in the midst of an ungodly world.

SERMON XIX.

CHRISTMAS DAY.

1854.

JOHN XV. 11.

“These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.”

THE circumstances of the great event of this day are familiar to us all. What child does not know of the light that shone about the shepherds—of the Babe laid in the manger? Who has not from his infancy had these glorious things bound about his very heart by gentle words, by pictures, by carols, by the yearly recurring joy of Christmas?

Yet the longer we live, the more wonderful does the event of this day appear. The advance of years brings with it larger views of the character and spirit of facts in the world's history. The mind takes in a wider grasp. From contemplating in childhood the mere details with unquestioning joy, we learn, as we live on, to

ask why these things were so, and to give account of our joy to ourselves. We learn not to rest in mere fresh and springing feeling, but to test that feeling by appeal to stern matter of fact. And wherever the feeling is a worthy one, and will bear the application of the test, the result is that it is marvellously deepened and increased. The child's Christmas joy, like a child's other joys, is a gushing exuberance of momentary gladness,—the fulness of one energy within him,—and one only: its elements being many attendant circumstances, which go to make up this season's festivity. And let him share it while he may—for it is his life. Blessed are the teachings of a child's sorrows,—blessed also are the teachings of his joys;—and of all most blessed those which are bound up with holy things, and with family love, and with his Saviour Himself, as these are. But the *man's* Christmas joy, is the joy of the soul which rests on God in the midst of active strife;—of the mind which is continually pushing fresh enquiries, and continually finding new satisfaction in the unfathomable depth of God's dealings;—of the eye which is ever ranging over the pages of history, comparing and estimating and judging, bringing fresh peoples, and fresh events, and fresh national characteristics into its field of view. And such a joy, while it is not so exuberant, nor so evident to those without, is far more ingrained into the texture

of life—far more powerful—able to fill the whole being, to stir the tear of sympathy, and to move the hand of charity, and to nerve the arm for the battle with unbelief, and to remain in us in the hour of trial: less like a flitting meteor, however bright and beautiful,—and more like the permanent sunshine; light that carries warmth, and that ripens fruit for God.

In another particular also, the difference is striking, between the Christmas joy of the child and the joy of the man. The former is apt to be shaken and interrupted by contrast and disappointment. It is dependent on circumstances. Not so the other. Years bring disappointments: every fresh experience of the world shews it in deeper contrast to the will and character of God: but the more the mature Christian has been disappointed, tried, harassed, the deeper his joy at God's unspeakable gift: the darker the cloud which hangs over the world, and man, and all but His Saviour, the brighter is the loveliness of that Face, to whose unveiled presence every Christmas brings him nearer.

Now our Lord in my text had been speaking to His disciples of very mournful things: of His speedy departure from them: of their being left alone in the world without Him: nay He introduces the whole discourse of which they form part, with "Let not your heart be troubled." And yet He tells them, "These things have I

spoken unto you that my joy may remain in you, and that your joy might be full." And why? Because all these mournful things, unpromising as they might seem, were in the very path and highway to joy. Their Lord's departure was to prepare a place for them: "If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I go to my Father:" "Ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy." And though these disciples were to be sorely tried with the world's hatred—though they were to have trial of cruel workings and scourgings, of bonds and imprisonment, yea in some cases were to be stoned and sawn asunder and slain with the sword,—yet every such trial would tend, and did tend, to fill up their cup of joy, to make it more abiding—to transform it more into His joy, abiding in them. What said one, who though not present when these words were uttered, yet afterwards became one of the chief among the goodly fellowship of the Apostles? "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dross, that I may win Christ and be found in Him ¹." And what said another of them, who had spent a long life in the varied trials and afflictions of the ministry, amidst persecution without and

¹ Phil. iii. 8.

opposition within? What wrote he, in an epistle full of the dark signs of the last time,—of solemn warnings, and deep entreaties to steadfastness in the faith? After all this disappointment, all this life of storm and conflict, he but echoes the words of his divine Master, “These things write I unto you, that your joy may be full².”

I believe I am speaking the mind of most of us, when I say that we meet together this Christmas day with very mingled feelings. Our Christmas joy seems almost out of place this year. The day has not lost its charm, nor the event its blessed import: but there are dark and unwelcome contrasts which occur to every one to-day. “Rejoice? yes, but how can we rejoice, when so many weep?”—“how can we surround the blazing hearth with our usual cheerful faces, while those places are empty?—their occupants,—O where? How can we rejoice when so many of our fellow-countrymen are facing danger and death in that distant peninsula? The heart of England is there, not here: and how can there be joy, where the heart is not?”

Such are the questions, I doubt not, which have risen in many a mind to-day: which, among the preparations for social intercourse and festive meetings, have been floating about in many a family, ready to be uttered by the first

² 1 John i. 4.

that is bold and quick of speech. And I have chosen my text, that I may speak to you of a joy which is not interrupted by such contrasts, which these questions do not touch with blight or sadness.

It is written, "Rejoice in the Lord³." And WHAT IS "joy in the Lord?" Is it merely the joy of the child, a flash of meteoric light, without permanence, without a fixed source within, or an abiding effect without? No indeed. Joy in the Lord has for its ground, knowledge of the Lord. And knowledge of this kind. In order to rejoice in the Lord, you must know the Lord not as you know a mere fact, but as you know a dear friend, a loving father, one who is the source of your life, the fountain of your good, the hope of your soul, the desire of your heart. Thus rejoice in Him: "God is mine. All His dealings in Providence, all His workings in grace, are mine, for my eternal good. He who gave His own Son for me, how shall He not with Him also freely give me all things?" And how and whence come all these blessings? How do I know God to be mine? How do I know all His dealings to be for my good? Have I any exclusive right to His favour? Am I, or are any set of men to whom I may suppose I belong, His favoured ones? Have I aught in myself recommending me to Him? Do I

³ Phil. iv. 4.

stand out from among mankind in any one particular, that I thus claim God for mine,—His dealings for my hope and joy? Do I bear any charmed life, that I say, “None of these things move me, but they are all for my good?” No, not for an instant. I am one of the great family of man, of that family which fell from their Father’s favour through sin, which lost for ever the power to reinstate themselves in His love: one of that family, which filled the dark corners of the earth with cruelty and uncleanness: which, in its Jewish branch, would not have the Lord God to reign over them—quenched the life of his Spirit in the deadness of the letter, held the book of His Law with the paralyzed grasp of formalism, and scanned its pages with the double eye of hypocrisy:—whose Gentile branch built up the tower of intellectual pride to reach to heaven, while the workmen grovelled in sensuality and evil passions beneath:—I am of that ruined, distracted, despairing, exiled family. Whence then comes my claim upon God—my right to call Him mine?

One night, many years since, some of the humblest brethren of this our fallen family were sharing their inheritance of toil while others slept. They were shepherds, abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night. Suddenly, light shone about them. “Good tidings of great joy” resounded in their ears. The assembled hosts of heaven

proclaimed good-will towards men. That night our claim on God was established. That night unto us was born a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. In our nature, the Godhead dwelt. Thenceforth the great family was again united in the Father's love. Again the seed of righteousness was dropped into the soil of man's nature. And all which that Incarnation implied, was undertaken and accomplished by this its second and righteous Head. By Himself He purged our sins. He fought with and conquered death for us. He ascended up on high, and received gifts for us,—even the Spirit of holiness, to dwell in us and transform us into His image. He pleads for us in the holy place above. And He belongs to us all. “Good tidings of great joy which shall be to ALL PEOPLE.” He is the possession, by gift of God, of the whole human family. “Unto us a child is born—unto us a son is given.” So that I, a member of that guilty and exiled family, have thus a ground and a claim, whereby I can rejoice before God and in God. CHRIST IN MY NATURE is my claim. This human form, this flesh and blood, is His—reconciled to God by the blood of His cross, consecrated by His indwelling in it, yea standing at this moment accepted, exalted, glorified, at God's right hand in heaven. And henceforth, He, my Saviour, the All-gracious who loveth me and gave Himself for me,—the All-powerful, who is Head

over all things to His Church, who hath undertaken all things for His people, is waiting till all things be put under His feet. All that takes place in the world among the nations, however unpromising it may appear, I know to be the carrying out of His ultimate purposes. All that befalls our own nation, or any members of it, I know to be measured out by His infinite wisdom, and tempered by His love. And when the militant Church has achieved her triumph, and sin and disappointment and sorrow shall be for ever left behind, I believe we shall look back on these our days, in which we struggled with trials and difficulties,—and read the reason of every trial, and see the necessity of every chastisement,—and exclaim, in the rapture of that satisfaction which will be the portion of those who awake up after His likeness, “He hath done all things well.”

These things He is doing with us, *that His joy may remain in us*. Men are always tempted to rejoice, not in Him, but in themselves and the world; in their strength, their comforts, their advantages. And when we beheld these islands of ours, exempted so long from the horrors of war,—our towns unwallled and secure, our peaceful villages, our fields regularly tilled,—our people for the most part loyal and honourable in spirit,—our position as the pattern of the nations;—when we added to these things our many religious advantages, our open Bible,

and our freedom of conscience,—we were apt perhaps to rejoice with a joy which was not “His joy”—a joy which rested in ourselves, and in things of this earth. But now He has shaken our security in these things, that we may live nearer to Him; that we may learn when and where only is the joy that *remains*,—not written in the sand and washed out by every tide, but graven on the everlasting rock,—and that by personal experience we may each one rejoice in Him alone; in Him, whatever betide; in Him, for ever and ever.

And these things He is doing with us, *that our joy may be full*. If He had left us to ourselves, we should be filling the cup with strange ingredients, which we mistake for joy. We should mix in our national exclusiveness, our earthly pride, our carnal security,—and thus, when the cup of joy seemed to be full, and we lifted it to our lips to drink, it would be part joy and part bitterness:—but O beloved, He is casting out the bitterness, and though in His own way and not in ours, He is filling the cup with true unmixed joy, joy which will abide with us and refresh us, and stand every trial; joy which will be joy on the bed of sickness and in the prospect of death,—yea, and when death is past, in His heavenly kingdom.

And I am speaking to some, to whom the sound of rejoicing in Him is altogether new and strange. You, it may be, have usually

found mirth at Christmas, but it has been mirth of this world and of this world alone. You have hitherto seen no inconsistency in indulging in vain and sinful pleasures, at the season when He came into the world, who was manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil. You have seen no inconsistency in celebrating the birth of Him whose soldiers and servants you were once declared to be, by carrying to the utmost that pomp, and those vanities of the world, which you then promised to renounce. Again and again God's ministers have called to you to take warning and repent, but their voices you have not heeded; and now God Himself has spoken in a voice which you cannot choose but hear. You have paused for a moment in your giddy course. So many families in mourning—so many struck down by disease or battle—such uncertainty what news a day may bring forth—all or nearly all, seem to agree that it is not a time for boisterous mirth, and unlimited festivities, and personal or social display. And O that God's Holy Spirit may enter in at the open door of this nation's heart—that it may not be as it was two hundred years since, when after that dark age of national affliction and excited and unnatural religious feeling, the tide of luxury and profligacy returned to its strength when the morning appeared! Let every servant of the Lord among us pray, that in this little

pause many a soul may hear for the first time the still small voice within,—and be carried on through the conviction of sin to the putting on of Christ's righteousness by faith, and from that to the judging and despising and forsaking the world! O that this Christmas, chequered and lowering as it seems, may be to many here the dawn of the day-spring from on high—the beginning of real genuine abiding Christmas joy, even joy in the Lord our Saviour!

For I would not have one jot of the season's true mirth abated. Wherever Christ is named, men should rejoice to-day, and Christian men will rejoice. Here at home, in spite of, and even because of, the trials and chastisements which are befalling us, thousands of hearts will be full of thankfulness for Him who alone can bear us up in sorrow, and bind up the broken-hearted; and even there, in the camp, and in the trenches, many a devout soldier will lift up his soul to God, and praise Him for His unspeakable gift. On those wild heights, amidst peril and death, the Spirit of the Lord can kindle a light bright as that which shone round the tranquil shepherds at Bethlehem,—and in the face of stern war and the hearing of its alarms, can speak sweet peace within, goodwill to mankind, and glory to God. And there doubtless to-day, as here, will the feast be spread in the Lord's name, and his guests invited, and with angels and arch-angels and all

the company of heaven, they will laud and magnify His glorious name, and eat and drink in remembrance of Him.

Therefore, beloved, why should our Christmas joy be marred this year, any more than at other times? What if the world have less charms for us now, than before? This day, and the event of this day, and the hopes which this day begun, have more. What if solemnity mingle with our joy? It is only, so to speak, the balance-work, whereby it shall be made more regular and more abiding. What, if the Lord's hand be uplifted among us? It is only that our joy may be His joy, and may remain in us for ever.

Let then our Christmas be not worse, but better kept, than in other years. Better, because we are testing the reality of the blessing in which we rejoice;—better, because thoughts are working in us all, which will not let us rest with merely this world's mirth, but carry us up to Him who is the source and centre of our joy;—better, because we are called to suffer with Christ as well as to meditate on Him: not only to stand and gaze on His cradle in Bethlehem, but to follow Him through that street in Jerusalem, bearing our cross as He bore His.

And if there be one Christian grace more especially becoming this year's Christmas than another, it is that of large and generous sympathy for the suffering and destitute. It is

contemplated by many, that in consequence of the serious demands made on us by the war, both in taxation and in various voluntary efforts, our home charities and our religious institutions will considerably suffer. I hope and trust not : it need not be so : and I am willing to believe, by the result of our recent collection for the Melanesian mission, that we of this congregation have resolved, by God's help, that it shall not be so. Remember that we have every prospect of a distressing winter before us. The combination of high prices of provision with an almost universal depression of activity at home, must of necessity press hardly upon the poor. Already, notwithstanding that God has been pleased to bring us thus far without any severity of cold, we begin to find this the case in our own district. And if we pass from our immediate home duties, and our own offertory contributions, to the religious and charitable institutions of our country, I fear the effect is even thus early, beginning to tell on their never too-abundant funds. Already we hear of committees resolving to undertake no new work for the present, of some grants obliged to be withdrawn, and others diminished. And therefore I do exhort you earnestly, now, at this time of the year, when men look their annual expenditure in the face, and when it doubtless will be found in many cases that economy must be exercised somewhere, to bear these things in

mind, and leave if it be possible the share of charity and of God untouched. Straiten your luxuries, your mere concessions to fashion and human opinion, your comforts, if need be; but O do not straiten the works of love—do not blight the little fruit, scanty and poor indeed, but such as it is, the effect of divine grace, which this favoured and prosperous people is bearing for God. Let us all resolve, that whatever burdens this war may lay upon us shall be otherwise provided for; but that, come what may, short of absolute necessity, our charitable contributions shall not be decreased. Depend on it, if there be truth in God's word, those who thus resolve and thus act, will not find themselves losers.

Finally, let me remind you that the chief demonstration, the head and crown of our Christmas joy, is that holy feast to which we are now bidden. If it be customary (and a blessed custom it is) to rejoice to-day in the family festal meeting, how should we, the reconciled family of God in Christ, rejoice, to meet round His table, His invited and accepted guests, and partake of His rich bounties! May He bring us to His banqueting-house, and may His banner be over us for love! And although, nay even because, He is now speaking to us words of solemnity and sadness, may His joy remain in us, and may our joy be full!

SERMON XX.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.

LAST DAY IN THE YEAR.

REV. XV. 3

“Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty ;
just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints.”

WE begun the year with one of these sublime ascriptions of praise, which the beloved Apostle heard uttered in Heaven ;—‘ Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.’ And with another such, let us end it :—even with the hymn of the victorious saints above, who stand on the sea of glass mingled with fire, having the harps of God. It testifies to His works, as being great and marvellous ; to His ways, as being just and true. We cannot look back, as they, over the whole course of time, and see God’s dealings with man in their unity and completeness ; but we can review to-day one of those periods which naturally invite us to reflect on His ways, and to endea-

your to comprehend them. At such a time, no subject can be more fitting for us—none more solemn. When we spoke on that other heavenly utterance, we stood on the verge of uncertainty, looking into the future. God's afflictive judgments were as yet suspended over us. None knew where, or how heavily, they would fall. Pestilence lay slumbering in the bosom of our country; war approached her from without. Now, we can look back on His visitation of our homes—severe indeed in some cases, but full of mercy and of teaching. Now, we have entered deep into the realities of war. The sword indeed reacheth unto the soul. But the lesson of the past, and the burden of the present, is no other than our confidence for the future—the mighty truth on which we then spoke to you; the holiness—the power and wisdom and love—the justice and truth of Him, who rules and orders past, present and future alike.

Of Him therefore let us speak now, as then; on the last day of our year, as on the first. His great designs are opening onward. Another chapter of the history of human collision, human alliance, human intercourse, has begun; and as far as it has advanced, we may study and profit by it.

All our various sciences deal with separate portions of God's works; it is by combining their results, that we may at last arrive at some knowledge of His purposes, in making

those works as we find them. Geography shews us continents and islands scattered over the globe, in wild irregular figures, as if by chance; History informs us, what part each of these bore in the upward progress of man; tells us, that of illustrious men the whole earth is the tomb; records the share of mountain passes, and rivers, and islands, and the broad sea, in the freedom and advancement of mankind. And so Geography and History combined, declare to us that God has made nothing on this earth, and placed nothing, in vain; that not a mountain lifts its head to the sky, not a valley smiles with its stream and meadows, not an island marks the otherwise trackless deep, not a realm of barren ice and snow stretches beneath the arctic winter, without each having its allotted portion to fulfil in His great purposes, who is the Creator, the Disposer, the Upholder of all.

And if we comprehend but little of this vast whole,—if there seem to us still to be confusion and chance-medley in the arrangements of God's world, and only a few stand out self-explained in the apparent chaos,—yet we know that it is only our weakness, our inexperience, our midway position in the development of God's purposes, which prevents our seeing more. Already we are not without such landmarks of progress and instruction. The plains of Babel, the mountain head of Sinai, the hill of

Zion, the pass of Thermopylæ, the Acropolis of Athens, the island fortress of Britain,—these, and such as these, vindicate their places on the soil of the earth, and tell us that they should not have been otherwise than as they are. But who knows how many more may not tell of higher purposes served, before God has done with this world of ours? In our own day, names hardly known by mankind are claiming similar places in the regard of the ages to come. Who shall say, whether that peninsula commanding the waters of the Euxine may not hereafter be seen to have been as important a landmark in the history of our race, as ever has been Thermopylæ or Athens? Whether those strangely communicating inland seas, reaching up far into the wilds of the East, may not prove to have been as necessary to the civilization and Christianizing of mankind, as ever were the island stepping-stones across the Ægean of old?

And why do I mention these things? It is, that I may transfer the argument from one domain of our knowledge to another: that I may claim for another portion of the instruction of history, the same power to teach us, to inspire confidence in God, and cheerful reliance on His wisdom and love. History, as God's witness, points with one hand to space, with the other to time. She lights up the barren places of the earth with events,—peoples its wastes with the

spirits of men: but she also lights up events themselves with the luminous track of continued purpose, and gradual development of great principles. While incidents are happening around us, we in vain strive to discern the fitness and the intent of each. We are like the traveller among the hedges by the way, or the streets in the town,—unable to trace the windings of the road, or take in the design of the city: whereas if he mounts an eminence, or a commanding tower, all is clear to him. The rivers and the hills, which turned his road out of its course, are spread before him: the chief places of concourse to which the streets converged, lie mapped out beneath his eye. And such an eminence is History, with regard to the purposes of God in events. Let us shew this, by two notable examples.

Six hundred years before Christ, all was confusion and dismay in Jerusalem. The city where God had placed His name, was broken up by the Chaldees, and the flower of His people carried away captive. The king, and nobles, and the core of the nation, were transported to Babylon: the rest were scattered in slavery over the East. Do we seek a description, which shall catalogue for us the various abodes of the exiles, and the races among whom they sojourned? Take it in the well-known words of the Pentecostal history: “Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judæa, and

Cappadocia, in Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians¹." All these, the fruits of that exile of Israel, were gathered in the re-peopled Jerusalem, and heard in their own tongues the wonderful works of God. All these listened with devout admiration to the utterance of that first outpouring of the Spirit on all flesh. And if we wish for a further testimony, we have the Christian epistle of St. James, written "to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad:" and "the church which is at Babylon, elected together with you," of St. Peter².

Again: in the fourth century before Christ, Asia was overrun by a victorious band of Greeks. Its governments were overthrown, its families desolated, its tranquillity broken up. And in all this, men saw nothing but terrible reprisals for the invasion of Greece a century and a half before. History, however, has cast back light upon God's purposes in this hostile incursion, and shewn us in it the preparation for the Gospel of Christ, by the universal dispersion of that tongue, in which its record was to be written.

I mention only these two cases: they might be indefinitely multiplied. It is in fact the highest office of History, thus to bring events

¹ Acts ii. 9—12.

² James i. 1; 1 Pet. v. 13.

into coherence, and to shew their places in the unfolding of God's designs.

But, as I hinted, this is commonly not possible, till the course of action of which the events form a part has at least received some completeness, and can be judged of as a whole. When we look at God's dealings with us during the past year, we see much that appears mysterious and unassignable. A matter of apparently distant import involves us in the affairs of a people, with whom we have no immediate nor necessary connexion in blood or in religion. Out of this springs war, with all its horrors. We may acknowledge this His dispensation to be great and marvellous: but we do not so readily yet recognize its justice and its truth. Our tranquillity is disturbed, our homes are desolated, our hearts filled with anxiety; and a complicated course of action is brought on us, of which none can at present foresee the issue, or exactly specify the purpose, as regards ourselves, or the nations of the world. And this tends not a little to disturb the faith and confidence of many, who in the ordinary trials and anxieties of life find that faith and confidence sufficient. Men say, "Why has all this come upon us?" "Wherefore this waste of human life,—this effusion of innocent blood,—this marring the hopes and darkening the prospects of thousands?" It would ill become me, in this place, to enter on any reply to these questions,

but that one which cannot be gainsaid ;—“ It is the Lord : let Him do what seemeth Him good.” There can be no doubt that He has great ends to accomplish, towards which these events are the means in His hand. We may humbly trust that not a life now taken, not a drop of blood now shed, will prove in the end to have been wasted : that irrespective of the dispensations of love to individuals and to families which may be hidden under the dark clouds of suffering, the wide world will one day be permitted to see, that such lives and such blood have been precious seeds for good, though in what precise way does not at present appear to us.

With regard then to the past, ‘ IT IS THE LORD.’ We see His works to be great and marvellous ; we believe that we shall one day know them to be just and true. Let this be impressed on every citizen, at the end of this our year of strange things. God has brought us thus far. And we have confidence enough in His character as revealed to us by Himself, as confirmed by the history of the world, to know that there are gracious purposes, concealed as yet in the depths of His unfathomable Providence, which shall be unfolded to us, or to our children, in His due time. In the case of private grief or anxiety, this lesson comes nearer home. And it will be also much more generally learned. For we are more apt

to forget God's hand in His larger dealings, than in His smaller ones. The same infirmity of our nature, which is found to render men's consciences less tender when in association with others, than when acting alone, operates also in making us less quick to acknowledge God in His national, than in His domestic and individual dispensations. Hardly any man dares, when bereaved or suffering, to repudiate the acknowledgment of God, or to place any secondary causes in comparison with His all-powerful will. But many a man will not scruple to ascribe the bereavements and calamities of a nation to human unskilfulness or want of foresight, almost to the exclusion of His agency. If this be so, then let every bereaved, every anxious family and Christian, take advantage of this greater disposition to acknowledge God,—look back on what has befallen, and adore, while they trust, His mysterious Providence, whose Name is Love. The year past has scattered your earthly hopes; let it knit up for ever your heavenly ones. It has broken up your home here; let it bring to you the first, or the increased consciousness, of a home elsewhere, which can never be broken up. It has interrupted the peace of mind in which you long dwelt, and distracted you with manifold anxieties; let it be to you the beginning of that peace which passeth understanding, that peace which depends, not on the evenness of the uncertain

surface, but on the immoveable calm of the depths, which no tempest reaches. It perhaps has first shewn you God meddling in your affairs, and interfering with their course: O let it teach you ever to behold Him moving amongst them,—ordering them by His Power, arranging them by His Wisdom, tempering them by His Love.

Thus far we have been speaking of God in the *past*. We have been endeavouring to shew, and to impress on you, that if at the beginning of this year, on a survey of His mercies, we found reason to adore, in the course of our history, His holiness, His justice and His truth, that reason is in no way now lessened, by the mysterious events which the year has brought with it.

Let us come to the *present*. Let us ask ourselves where we stand at the end of this year; what frame of mind befits us to-day. Unquestionably, we are brought, in heart and feeling, in attitude and expectancy, nearer to God. This is almost universally confessed. A solemnity has spread itself over society. If all do not feel it, those who are the exceptions at least keep quiet, and so in some measure defer to the rule. I need not say to such as are real Christians, that this is to us a wonderful dispensation of our God; that the fact is one full of deep interest, and bringing with it deep responsibility. First, as regards ourselves. Shall the

light and worldly be awed, and veil their faces as our God passes by, and shall we not be moved to more self-devotion to Him, more fervour of zeal, more earnestness of prayer? Next as regards others. Let us reflect, how many might at such a time be influenced for good; to how many a word in season might find its way through the open ear to the softened heart, and there, by the blessing of the divine Spirit, become the germ of life eternal. O let us not hesitate to carry such a thought into practice in our daily life and intercourse. And that, in full confidence in the present agency of Him who has men's hearts in His Hand—certain that He cannot have brought about this general solemnity of feeling, this trying of the inner lives of men, without having at the same time much to do among His churches here—many to awaken, many to build up, many to ripen.

And while on God's present doings with us, let me not forget one point, which I brought before you on our day of humiliation last Easter, but which needs impressing again and again. I then said, that one of the calamities of a state of warfare is, the lowering of the Christian standard of duty as to peaceful and charitable thoughts. I said, that "whereas in peace the minds of men are but backward to receive the gentle and holy maxims of Christianity, in war the very aspect and state of the national mind is and must be in a great measure anti-Chris-

tian³.” To this rule I am thankful to say we have had many bright exceptions, but still its truth as a whole cannot be questioned, nor the great danger of each one of us affording an example of it. O let us remember, that neither God’s character, nor our profession, is altered by circumstances. He is the God of peace and love, not of strife and confusion. We are men of peace, promised a blessing as peace-makers. If we lose this character, we lose our consistency as soldiers and servants of Christ. The difference between ourselves and those who address us in favour of peace at all hazards and at every moment, is merely this,—that we claim to exercise, in our capacity of peace-makers, common prudence, as to the means of rendering that peace more effective and permanent. It is just the difference, in another department of human action, between the man who must always be spending and always enjoying, and the man who denies himself for the present, in order to lay up for the future. And we besides maintain the lawfulness of our conduct as Christians, by what we believe to be legitimate inference from the words and spirit of our Saviour. But we must equally remember, that our ultimate object, and theirs, is one and the same ;—we both are in quest of peace ;—and of this we must never lose sight. It will be well

³ See vol. i., p. 275.

for us, at all solemn times of reflection, during war's continuance, to call our thoughts and modes of expression back to the rule of Christ's Gospel, that we drift not away with the world from the true spirit of our religion, but remain fast anchored—holding by Him, who is our rock—the God of peace and love.

As to His present dealings with each one among you, "the heart knoweth its own bitterness, and a stranger doth not intermeddle with its joy." So that I can only say, "In all thy ways acknowledge Him." Whatever measure He is at present meting to thee, however marvellous His ways, seek to believe them to be just and true; learn to trust Him, that thou mayest learn to praise Him. The year which has past has not exhausted His loving-kindness, nor weakened His power, nor caused Him to forget one of His promises in Christ. Realize His everlasting covenant,—repose in His justice,—lean upon His truth,—and thou art safe.

And now, from speaking of the past and the present, let us look on to the *future*. And never perhaps has a year gone down, with greater demands on our faith and hope, than this which is now closing. Never has our national position, never have even the precious advantages which we most value, lain so visibly in God's hand as at present. We know not what a day may bring forth. None can form

even a probable conjecture as to the state of our affairs, when the end of another year comes round. But in the midst of this uncertainty, our hope is in the Lord our God. However great and marvellous may be His work on us and among us, He will be just and true in his dealings with us. Our firm belief is, that He does hear, and will hear, the faithful prayers of his people. We are convinced that our course is a just one, and are not afraid to lay its issue before Him, the God of justice, in continual prayer. We are true men: not doing battle for by-ends of our own, but in simplicity and sincerity, and we can call on the God of Truth to prosper us. He whose faithfulness is manifested in the past, will not change His character in what is to come. If it be His will to humble us, it will be that we may rise the higher for His chastisement: if He see fit to lift us to still greater responsibilities in the world, He will minister grace sufficient for us to discharge them. Thus, His people have nothing to fear. Let but their part be faithfully and Christianly done, and the general issue lies with Him, to ordain as He shall see fit. These are, it is true, but common-place words with the worldly and outwardly religious: but O they are the very life and support of the Christian at times like this. "The Lord reigneth," is His tower of strength. He feels this as a blessed truth, throwing over him, in the midst of dangers, the

shield and shadow of the most High. And if He whom we serve is thus holy in His dealings and righteous in all His works, let us now more than ever remember, that without similar holiness, no man shall see Him:—that one great end of His manifesting Himself to His creatures is, that they may become like Him.

Seek, beloved brethren, for this holiness. In your resolutions for the coming year, resolve to live closer to God. Eternity, and His presence, are coming daily nearer to you: do you daily draw nearer to Him. Study His word more constantly and more deeply. Give more attention to prayer—to the prayer of the heart. Delight more and more in praise. Be more fruitful in works of mercy and Christian love. Let not the excitement without break down the fortress of the spiritual life within. Strive not to be restless, swayed hither and thither by hope and fear, ever running about seeking some new thing:—but be steadfast, stayed on the Lord, active at His work where He has placed each of you, waiting His call to resignation or to thankfulness. And, in aiming at holiness, fly I entreat you from the controversies of our day: fly from party names and party practices, and seek rather this blessed knowledge of God's works and ways. Use not Christ's precious name, and the glorious truths which belong to it, to build up your Church-system, and foster divisions; but use all ordinances, all outward

decencies and rules, as means to grow in the apprehension and in the love of Him. Remember, holiness is in the life, and *there* must this knowledge be sought: in living as in God's presence and unto Him, in the daily duties and interests of our appointed stations: in waiting on Him as His servants, and obeying the godly motions of His Spirit.

Thus may you, each in His degree and place, be increasing in holiness and His fear, and tending onward to the state where His people will be holy, even as He is holy. For none but they who are so, can enter into the fulness of this sublime ascription of praise. Here below, its strains fall comparatively powerless upon us. Our comprehension of His dealings is limited and erroneous: our tongues are slow to glorify Him; our thoughts and motives are divided, our service feeble, our very prayers tainted with sin:—but *THERE*, where all shall know Him from the least even to the greatest, where every tongue shall be set free, every thought directed in purity and simplicity to Him,—His servants mighty to do His will, and all sin put away for ever,—when His kingdom shall have come, and His saints be reigning with their King,—there first shall the fulness of these words be felt; then shall it be seen, how year after year, and age after age, and nation after nation, and peace and war, and blessings and afflictions, and life and death, have all poured in their evidence to

justify Him in His doings, and clear Him when He is judged. And then, not by the stammering lips and imperfect voices of flesh and blood, but by the tongues of angels and on the harps of God, shall be sung the song of Moses and of the Lamb, the great confession of the universe, the verdict of the pure in heart on the course of this world which was ordered by His governance,—

GREAT AND MARVELLOUS ARE THY WORKS,
LORD GOD ALMIGHTY: JUST AND TRUE ARE
THY WAYS, THOU KING OF SAINTS.

THE END.

Date Due

[illegible]



